ゼロの使い魔
17
〈黎明の修道女（スール）〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

# Novel Illustrations

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ゼロの使い魔17
ヤマグチノボル

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## ゼロの使い魔17　黎明の修道女（スール）

奇妙な二人組の刺客に襲われた才人は、心配して捜しにきたシエスタに助けられて息を吹き返す。しかし、待っていたのは、「ルイズがいない」という現実。落ち込みまくる才人は、シエスタに叱られ、励まされて、ルイズを捜し始める。アンリエッタにも事の次第を報告し、大がかりな捜索へと発展した。その頃、傷心のルイズはとある宿場町で、危険な雰囲気をまとう魅力的な少女と知り合う。ジャネットと名乗る彼女は、ルイズに「ひっそりと身を隠して暮らせる場所」を教えてくれるという。大人気冒険ファンタジー、離ればなれになった才人とルイズの行く末は!?　緊迫の第17弾!

**ヤマグチノボル**（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『魔法薬売りのマレア　千日カゲロウ』『ストライクウィッチーズ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』『遠く6マイルの彼女』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『ゼロの使い魔』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎**兎塚エイジ**（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ。大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
イラスト仕事歴は
「道士さまといっしょ」（電撃文庫）
「ふたりはなめこじる」（電撃hp）
「神曲奏界ポリフォニカ ぶるう」シリーズ（GA文庫）
「悪魔憑きの目覚め」（富士見ドラゴンブック）
「ゼロの使い魔」（MF文庫J）
などです。
初のイラスト集「兎塚エイジ Zéro ゼロの使い魔イラストコレクション」（メディアファクトリー）も好評発売中。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

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17
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ヤマグチノボル

「上等だ！」
男の拳が飛んできて、ルイズは身をすくめた。
だが、男の拳がルイズを襲うことはなかった。
空気の塊に弾き飛ばされ、
男は地面に転がったのである。
「見てられませんわ
見てられませんわ
見てられませんわ」
そんなことをぶつぶつと呟きながら、
暗がりの中から一人の少女が現れた。

宿舎を出て、二人は岬の突端に出た。
双月が海に浮かび、
きらきらと輝いている。
波に散らされた光はまるで、
無数に浮かんだ銀色の鱗のようだった。
ため息をつくように、ルイズは言った。
「いやだわ」
「なにが？」
「バカみたいに綺麗なんだもの」

Character
ルイズ
才人を召喚したご主人様。才人とアンリエッタの逢引を目撃し、傷心のまま屋敷を飛び出した。
ティファニア
アルビオン王家の血を引くハーフエルフ。ルイズと同じ「虚無」の担い手。
マリコルヌ
水精霊騎士隊の隊員。
シエスタ
才人専属のメイドで、才人のことが好き。
アンリエッタ
トリステインの女王。かよわい一面を持ち、才人に想いを寄せる。
ギーシュ
水精霊騎士隊の隊長をつとめる。キザで女の子は見境なく口説く。
平賀才人（サイト）
ルイズの使い魔。トリステインにとっては救国の英雄。

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# ゼロの使い魔17
## 黎明の修道女（スール）

ヤマグチノボル

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# Chapter 1: Saito's Despair

“Uu… uu”

When Saito opened his eyes, he found himself lying on a bed of the mansion. Rays of morning light shone through the window.

“Are you okay, Saito-san?!”

“I…”

Saito replied with a croaking voice.

“What exactly happened yesterday?” Siesta asked in a hurry.

“Siesta, what’s wrong with me?” a pale-faced Saito asked.

“What do you mean? Because you were late in coming home, I went to search for you. Later, I found you lying on the side of a street… May I ask if you have found Miss Vallière yet?”

Jolts of dull pain assailed the back of his head.

While in pain, Saito remembered the events of the previous night vividly.

He had left the mansion to search for Louise.

Then, he was attacked by two men and a woman claiming to be the Elemental Siblings.

The “blade” was big and terrifying.

Then, because the blade had absorbed the energy, it exploded and shattered into pieces…

“Derf…”

Saito softly murmured, looking at the Japanese sword by his bedside.

“Derf-san? That sword? Now that you mention it, I haven't seen him anywhere…”

“He’s not around anymore. He shattered into pieces,”

Saito distractedly answered. Siesta wept, covering her mouth with her hands with an ‘ah’. Siesta clearly understood how close the relationship between the wise sword and Saito had been.

“How did that happen? Derf-san, is he really dead…?”

Saito began to talk about what happened the previous night. While he was drunk, he had found the keys in the kitchen.

"Isn’t there… a basement we couldn't get into? Those are the keys to it. In the basement, there is a very clean room…… later I found that the room is linked to the palace… and at the end of it……"

Linked to the palace.

Through these words, Siesta seemed to notice something.

"Ah," she uttered a startled expression… and then considered something while scratching her neck.

"Could it be that…"

"H-her Majesty the Queen came through…”

"Yes… Her Majesty Henrietta. Other than the arrival of Her Majesty the Queen, there was nothing else.”

Siesta was staring at Saito in a scary manner.

"Ah, so, because we were both interested in the basement… we'd taken a look! Just as we were inspecting the room, Louise……”

“You were discovered?"

From her serious tone, Saito nodded.

"What were the two of you doing?"

"Kissing…"

When Siesta heard that, her countenance darkened and she mercilessly slapped Saito on the face.

"Pa!" it clearly echoed throughout the entire room.

"This is for Miss Vallière.”

Saito, listless, opened his eyes wide in shock.

"And then?"

"'Then' what…?"

A still useless Saito, who had not completely woken up from his trance, asked Siesta.

“From there, continue."

Due to her tone, Saito continued. After finding out that Louise left, he frantically tried to catch up. Along the way, he met those strange aristocratic brothers and sister. They invited him to join them, but suddenly said they wanted to kill him. During the fight against the brother, Derflinger had shattered into pieces because he had absorbed too much magic…

Derf had become shards… Speaking of that moment, the reality finally hit Saito. Overcome with shock, he let the memories of his good friend's “death” come together in his mind. Tears slowly filled his eyes, and streamed down Saito's cheek.

"Uu, Siesta… Derf died… obviously, obviously, as a good guy…"

Siesta's eyes were also filled with tears, but she once again gave Saito a slap on the face.

Saito stared at Siesta with an expression of surprise. He seemed to want to say something, but kept his silence.

"Why are you crying?"

"Eh? B-because…"

"Is this the time to be crying?"

Siesta wiped the corner of her eye while holding back her tears.

"Even though I also want to cry out, because there is no time to cry, I will not

cry. We must immediately find Miss Vallière, right? Even you had been attacked, and Miss Vallière might encounter the same danger.”

Saito opened his mouth with an “ah”. It was as Siesta said.

"I…… even though Miss Vallière and I are vying for Saito-san as rivals, I really like Miss Vallière. To be honest, there were times when I hated her even as I was complimenting her, and her personality cannot be considered good…

But I still like her very much. Because, a noble like her can sleep beside a person like me without voicing a complaint, isn’t that right? We are obviously rivals."

Saito suddenly clenched his fist tightly and wiped the corner of his eyes.

"Derf-san’s death also makes me extremely sad. However, if something happens to Miss Vallière, Derf-san would be all the angrier, right?"

He will say, “Partner, what kind of excuse have you come up with this time?”

Saito nodded his head from the bed and stood up. Derflinger's final words floated into his mind.

"You must apologise to that arrogant little lady…"

"…Siesta, you're right. This is really not the time to do such a thing."

Gathering his voice, Saito spoke. However… his voice was trembling, and his body staggered as if he was about to fall.

Saito said to himself, "This is not the time to do such a thing," while gripping the Japanese sword leaning against the bed which he inserted into his bed.

Siesta was holding on to this very Saito.

"This is it! This is Saito-san!"

"But, where exactly did Louise go… since I have no clue…”

"Anyway, let’s start by going to a place where she could possibly have gone.”

Saito and Siesta quickly organised their wardrobes and asked Grandmother

Helen to help look after the house. Looking at their faces, Grandmother Helen felt something was amiss and nodded her head with a serious expression.

Imagining where Louise might go, they walked to the streets.

After walking for a while, they came to the place where Bleu fought last night. The ground had deep cuts all over, displaying Bleu's powerful magic. They tried to find Derflinger’s fragments…but the pair couldn’t find them.

It was as if they had dissolved entirely.

Exactly who commissioned those siblings (2 brothers and a sister) to attack him…? However, given some thought, he was a celebrity after all. Even though he didn't consider it, there was the possibility of incurring the resentment of others. Speaking of which, a plebeian like himself becoming famous might just get the nobles jealous.

Saito clenched the hilt of his Japanese sword. Now is not the time to be thinking who exactly wants to attack. If someone comes to fight, then I’ll fight them.

But… can I still fight? Louise and Derf are not here. In this kind of situation, what do I do if I meet a stronger opponent?

Saito’s body was surrounded by fear and despair.

"…Ah, I have been relying on you, Derf.”

He didn't know why, but his own body did not feel like a part of himself. The core of his body felt as if it was deprived of life.

When they went to the inn, Saito borrowed horses to rush to Tristain. When they reached the Charming Fairies Inn, they were just preparing the stop for the night.

“Ah! If it isn't Saito and Siesta!"

Scarron welcomed them at first, but when he saw the look on Saito and Siesta’s faces, his expression changed.

"What happened?"

“…Have you seen Louise?"

Saito used a dead man's face to ask such a question.

Scarron narrowed his eyes and smiled.

“Ah, ah. It’s only rehearsal and already you have been angered? In that case, after graduation, that home sweet home is absolutely impossible!"

Hearing these words, Saito could not help but fall to his knees. No matter how desperately he tried to cheer up, this simple sentence had defeated him. In fact, nobody could blame Saito’s fragility. In the end, he is only a teenager.

"That is right… Now, living a new life is absolutely impossible… and I will never get the Vallière family's acknowledgement… I– I never expected…my actions could have lead to this"

"You’re going to look at other girls with perverted eyes anyway, right? So I say to just spend some quality time with Siesta! Have I not told you before? Ah, looks like I have not."

Siesta interrupted Scarron who still wanted to pursue the matter.

"Uncle Scarron! Please stop! Saito-san has just lost a close friend and is fragile!”

"Who is the close friend?"

"It's the talking sword. Saito-san was attacked by someone last night.”

Siesta said in a calm voice, Scarron’s expression turned serious.

"I see… Sure enough, the situation we were worrying about has happened.”

Looking down at a sea mouse-like Saito lying on the floor, Scarron said. The hero who saved the country had become useless all of a sudden.

"So, we need to find Miss Vallière as soon as possible…"

"En," Scarron nodded his head, then gave out instructions readily.

"First, we'll pass this information through the Owl Post to those places where

Louise-chan might have gone to: her classmates and the Cavaliers. Then the capitalists there… and also, the palace!”

Hearing the word ‘palace’, Siesta's shoulders shook slightly.

"…Actually, I don't think she will be in the palace."

"Why? Isn’t Henrietta Her Highness and Louise childhood friends?"

Then Scarron, like Siesta, could only stare as Saito fell prostrate onto the floor, muttering the vague, self-depreciating words, 'I'm useless, so freaking useless.I shouldn't have been born into this world as a child of this era. A Des Ornières mud dumpling! A rotten orange! My orange is Yanagisawa Kimio! He was interesting.' He opened his lips with a smack, and trembled as a cold sweat poured over him.

"D-don’t tell me… Saito’s love interest is… impossible… but looking at Saito-san’s past achievements… the country's best knight and Her Royal Highness Princess's tryst — there are still those kind of rumors… but I dared not think that the unexpected would become reality… ah ah, really wonderful!"

Scarron’s emotions were uncontrollable, turning back and forth.

"Uncle! Pull yourself together! Pull yourself together a little!"

Siesta shook Scarron awake, who dreamily muttered,

"The small girl boarded the dark stage of history! Ah ah, wonderful!"

Then Scarron stood up, patting the shoulder of Siesta.

“Siesta, you may be able leave a mark in history. If it comes true, you must tell your uncle because uncle wants to turn this story into a drama, letting it spread throughout the universe!”

"That's enough! Honestly!"

As Siesta raised her voice, Jessica, who had been doing laundry, suddenly jumped out.

"What? What happened?"

After listening to Scarron’s explanation, Jessica stared at Saito with wide eyes.

"Huuuuuuuuuh!?"

Scarron and Jessica, started muttering that this was the greatest dirty news of the Kingdom of Tristain and if this matter was to spread, the government would definitely be shaken.

"So, you definitely must not tell anyone! Writing it to be a drama is even more ridiculous!"

Under the harsh glare of Siesta, the two finally became more honest.

“Yes… It's not like I don't hear enough things that would cost more than a few lives. I won’t tell anyone, so don’t you worry."

"Next?"

"However, that aside, informing this matter to Her Majesty the Queen should be a little better. After all, Miss Vallière is a female officer of Her Majesty. Ah, this has become a grand event!"

Therefore, Saito wrote a few letters. The contents were, "Has Louise arrived there?” As summer vacation had arrived, the students had gone back home. The Ondine Knights were no exception. The only person who was willing to listen to Saito from Louise’s own family was Cattleya, so he wrote a letter to her, too. As he was writing, the sadness in his chest became unbearable. He had clearly promised Cattleya that he would protect Louise……but she ran away. At Tristain, even though they didn’t have a post office, there are industries like Japan that used owls to mail letters or articles.

He gave the letters to one of the Des Ornières post offices. Within two to three days, the letters would have been delivered.

Even though he was troubled, Saito finally rushed directly to Henrietta. Getting attacked by those unknown people also needs to be reported.

Letting Siesta stay in the Charming Fairies Inn, Saito rushed to the palace.

Because he was vice-captain of the Ondine Knights, he was immediately allowed to enter and have an audience in the waiting room.

What kind of facial expression should I use to face Henrietta? Alas… what kind of attitude should I show?

"Do I like Her Royal Highness Princess?"

Men who see Henrietta and not being able to say she was "beautiful" did not exist. Even Saito, lacking experience in matters of love, knows that Henrietta's charm was extraordinary.

However, Saito thought.

This was only an excuse. He would use the excuse that "being unable to resist that kind of charm is normal" to himself; this part of him was terrible.

The audience waiting room door was opened, a guard announced.

"Her Majesty the Queen, instantly summons the Ondine Knights vice-captain Hiraga."

Saito stood up and passed through the doors. There, Henrietta assumed a different attitude than what Saito imagined. General expression as if overly-thoughtful, sitting in a chair reading a letter deeply.

Noting that Saito had appeared, she raised her head, smiling. This smile, did not have any feelings and was different than last night's bright smile. It was simple, exposed only to reward the hard work of the vice-captain and his smile. Saito made a stiff expression. Henrietta gently waved her hand to allow others to leave. The guards standing next to the door exited the room. Making sure the guards were away, Henrietta sighed deeply. That beautiful face from the side started showing sorrow.

"Great. I was going to ask you to come."

"Me?"

"Yes… in fact, I just received a letter from Louise suddenly and was thinking of

what to do…”

Saito had a nasty burst of premonition. After reading the letters, he understood that his premonition was accurate. It read in gist, I wish to have myself removed from negotiable matters with the Gallia King, as well as relinquish my status of priestess.

“From start to finish in that room, Louise saw everything…”

"Is that so…"

Henrietta displayed a “It really was like that” kind of expression, being upset until she was out of line of sight.

"Certainly enough, that should not have happened."

As if to escape under that kind of Henrietta charm in general, Saito categorically said,

"… Today, I came just to report Louise’s disappearance but it seems Louise has already told Her Highness.”

Saito stared at the letter. Written on it wasn't a single word of blame directed at Henrietta. It merely stated her resignation and her gratitude for all the hospitality she had received in the past.

As Saito imagined the feelings of Louise as she wrote this letter, he felt his chest tighten in sadness. As long as he thought of that he may never meet her again, he could not bear it.

"Are there any clues as to where Louise is? Tentatively, I have sent letters to students and partners, as well as the Vallières…”

Henrietta said with an over thoughtful expression.

"…If women want to hide themselves, they will certainly go to the monastery or the Chamber of Commerce. I will give notice to the domestic monasteries to look for anyone that resembles Louise among the women who come to visit”

"For now...I'll look all over the country."

Speaking of which, Henrietta said with a troubled voice,

"…This is, after all, an affair of the state. Be sure to come back before the Gallia Queen's Coronation garden party starts.”

After considering for a moment, Saito nodded. Work was work, after all. Ah, it was also necessary to finish. Must be added with that of Louise's work together.

If he, however, did not find Louise, in that turn of events, Saito had no confidence whether he could complete his work successfully. However, if Tabitha was the same as before, he should be able to open up his mind.

“Yes. In short, I will come back before the deadline. If I am able to find her beforehand, that’s fine... After all, this is like looking for a gem in the sea."

Hearing the term ‘gem’, Henrietta gloomily closed her eyes. Even so, she said in a calm voice,

"To Louise, you are the gem…the same goes for you. It seems that this was doing of the fault that I committed, but…"

Henrietta raised her head and said categorically.

"But I do not regret it."

Saito cannot help but breathe. Henrietta placed her slender hand on his chest, like a sculpture in general good shape slowly closed her lips. At that time that glamorous atmosphere was not shown. Only great willpower… coming from the queen, her whole body emitted it. That kind of dignified attitude shook Saito’s heart.

Henrietta, in the sunlight, shone like a saint in virtuousness.

"This person has a twofold appearance of the day and night."

This has nothing to do with his own will, these two faces were expressed by Henrietta unconsciously.

"Does a woman with this kind of charm exist in the world?"

With an ‘ah’, Saito noticed. He felt a strong sense of shame to the ‘him’ who was thinking like this. My feelings… have I not just lost Louise…?

Terrible.

Saito murmured in his heart.

"I'm terrible,"

Saito thought as he could not forgive the “him” who was attracted to the woman before him.

**This text is a machine translation (MTL).**

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.

This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

# Chapter 2: Flight

Louise walked lifelessly on the street. She left the mansion on a horse but after leaving the Des Ornières mansion, she hid in a nearby farm so now she was on foot.

Louise had some hesitation at the fork leading to Tristainia and Western cathedral. Even though it'll be easier to hide in the capital, there was no way to guarantee who she would encounter. If she went in the opposite direction, she would be more visible but the worry of being exposed is smaller. In the end, Louise headed in the direction of the cathedral.

Saito and the others were heading towards the direction of Tristainia to give chase, so this fork in the road cwould be described as the turning point of fate.

She hurried through the night. When the sun rose, Louise rested under the shade of a tree along the street. She woke up exactly at noon. Looking at the bright sun, a burst of intense sadness suddenly hit Louise.

"There is already no place for me to return to"

Whether it's Saito or Henrietta, I don't need anyone.

"Of course."

Louise thought to herself.

"Although I'm treated as a void user, I've done nothing to match up to it. I'm always holding back and bringing trouble to Saito. I'm tired, of course."

Even though there couldn't be a situation like this virtually but after watching the look on Saito and Henrietta together, Louise could not believe herself.

There was only a huge sense of powerlessness and sadness surrounding the

whole body of Louise.

She bowed her head, her tears dropping one by one constantly. “Are you alright, miss?” a passing farmer asked but Louise did not respond and continued crying.

Many passing farmers and travelers looked at Louise with surprise as they walked past her.

How long have I cried?

By evening, her sadness turned into a deep emptiness.

“So, what do I do now?”

There was no place to return to and there was no place she wanted to go. Returning back home was also not an option. Might as well say that she didn’t want to meet anyone she knew.

Having said that, staying around there would not help. With an absent-minded expression, Louise started walking again. In order to stay away from the Des Ornières mansion.....

That night Louise reached a village inn and stayed there. Even though it was an old inn, it at least had a private room. For three consecutive days, Louise cried there. Gradually, her tears dried up.

On the morning of the third day, Louise washed her face with cold water. Finally, her head became clearer. Searching all her pockets, she found only about 100 ECU. The other things she brought with her are some change of clothes and daily necessities. Then there was the wand, prayer book and the ruby of water.

This hotel charges me a half ECU a day. If I save on meals, that’s half of the amount. If I calculate it this way, I can stay here for another 4 months but I cannot always live in one place. Maybe hiding in a monastery is the best after all?

“But I’ll be discovered quickly.”

Louise whispered with a deep sigh.

I do not have the experience of earning money for a living. Even though I ran away from home, what am I to live on?

Thinking of that, Louise shook her head.

“Doesn’t matter”

Yes. It doesn’t matter anymore. Next, she’ll take one step at a time. Louise pulled out a small mirror from the luggage and gazed into it. Cloudy dull dark brown eyes, dry tears sticking onto her face. Her hair was messy, because she did not comb during these days. Her lips lost their color and the shirt she had been wearing all this time was crumpled. This look is a far cry from the world-famous girl image.

“this was the face of the Horrendous Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière”

Louise sighed deeply.

“This face, isn’t it the same as your nickname? Zero. Louise the Zero……. Yes, I was originally a ‘Zero’. I don’t have anything. From the start, it was like that. The void users of legend, Aquileia's saint, the me who is suddenly raised to such a high position is only a woman”

Haha, Louise laughed to herself.

“Speaking of which, Saito and the Princess are also very welcomed by the people.”

Murmuring, she felt a big empty hole surrounding her heart. Although she felt lonely, there was a feeling that her heart had already completely stopped beating.

“Anyway, I'll go get a drink first”

Louise went downstairs and decided to go to the pub to drink. This was indeed a small hotel. The floor made crunching sounds; the table was full of dust and food leftovers. Mice scuttled across chairs. One look and the rumor about how ‘a noble like Louise can stay in an inn like this’ seems to be already exposed. The travelers there looked straight at Louise with faces of curiosity.

Not caring about the sight, Louise turned to the wine shopkeeper and pointed to

some of the older rosacea. The shopkeeper stared suspiciously at Louise,

“Although I have been living here for three days already, this inn is not a place a noble should live in”

Louise looked around her. Faces full of curiosity; men with ill intent seemed to be staring at her.

If she gets drunk here, it will only be a matter of time before it gets out……this is the same as announcing that she is here.

Ah, drinking wine is also troublesome……muttering that, Louise left the inn.

The next place to go is a town called Seoul Bi, from Thalia. it is a two day trip. The Earl governance of this town, is connected with many streets, it was a big village. It is an ideal place to hide one’s identity temporarily.

In this town, Louise prepared a program.

After settling down in the inn, she took the most beautiful clothes from among the clothes she brought. Then, using the makeup she once bought in the ‘Charming Fairies Inn’, she put on a heavy makeup. From the bottom of her makeup props, she noticed the magic dye she used to rescue Tabitha. Louise dyed her striking pink wavy hair brown.

“With this, I will also become the perfect woman of the night”

Her clothes and her makeup were completely disproportionate but Louise was very satisfied. With this, no one would think I am a noble.

When evening came, Louise walked proudly into a wine market and ordered wine. Although the shopkeeper looked at Louise suspiciously, he still passed the things she ordered to her.

Louise wanted to pour the red wine into the cup but changed her mind. She was currently not a noble. If she wants to drink quietly, she must act appropriately.

“That’s right. An idling person like me should just drink straight from the wine bottle”

Louise grabbed the wine bottle and put her mouth on it, gulping down the contents. After drinking one-third of it in one breath, she started coughing intensely.

“Cough! Cough, Cough!”

Her face turned red all of a sudden. Louise who was not really good with wine, stared with hate at the wine bottle. Saito’s face appeared on the wine’s surface.

“I hate you,” Louise muttered With squinted eyes as she drank another mouthful of wine. But, even with her drunken trance, she started to remember the happy times with Saito……

The day when he got summoned ... being rescued from the hands of a golem ... Dancing together for the first time ... the first time they kissed.

The feelings in her chest, One by one, clearly awakeningmade Louise sad.

“Forget. Must forget. People who idle don’t get bound to longing”

Louise drank a mouthful of wine again. From the deep within the pub, a young drunkard stood up and went closer towards Louise’s direction. Looking up, his face was not welcoming.

“Miss, that’s a really bold way of drinking. Can I have a cup too?”

Louise lifted her eyes at the voice laced with alcohol.

“Move aside”

Well, don’t say that……the man reaching out to touch her shoulder was kicked by Louise and sent flying.

“Who do you think I am? You dare to touch the Duke!”

Louise stops speaking up to here. She cannot expose her noble identity. The man that was sent flying stares angrily at Louise.

“what?”

“I-I’m just a hostess. Idling away. Err, Cough. “

Louise put her hand up to lean against her chin, desperately pretending to be a hostess.

“That’s why I want to drink with you” Well, there’s nothing wrong with that.

“Who wants to drink something with you……Ah!”

Louise gasped when The man grabbed Louise's hand.

“Let go! Let go of me NOW!”

She wanted to chant a spell but realized that she left her wand in her room. While strugglingLouise realized that she was no match for the muscular man, yet she continued.

“Even though I don’t know where you come from, you stubborn chick, but let me teach you a lesson”

The man dragged Louise towards the outside of the pub. The shopkeepers and the other customers turned a blind eye for fear they might be implicated. In the end, Louise got dragged outside the pub.

“Let go of my hand!”

As Louise cried, she bit the hand of the man bitterly. The sweaty hand made her feel like vomiting.

“That hurts! What are you doing!”

The man jumped up and brandished his fist towards Louise.

“Help! Sai-“

Louise was filled with anger when she almost called out Saito’s name without realizing it.

“I hate this kind of ‘you’”

“Very good!”

The man lowered his fist, Louise stood proudly. But before the man’s fist can touch Louise, he was knocked to the ground by an invisible bullet.

“I really can’t stand it I really can’t stand it I really can’t stand it”

From the darkness, a girl appeared, her chant like a whisper. Her body was dressed in a black dress wrapped with layers of white hemming. Inside the black headscarf was a doll-like fair face and shining green eyes.

“W-what are you doing! You jerk!”

The man who was standing was in a rage but when he noticed the short stick in the hand of the girl, his face was drained of color.

“N-noble”

“Huh? I'm not a noble; not anymore at least, but I am still able to use magic. Of course, to you, both sides are the same”

The girl smiled. At the same time, a strange formidable boldness from that upright face surfaced. "Dame," the man cursed, and then left.

Louise was temporary frozen on the spot; she hurriedly bent her head down to the girl.

“T-thank you for your help during that dangerous moment……”

“Nothing! It does not matter, right? Not injured are you?”

Louise shook her head.

“You are drinking here?”

The girl pointed at the pub. Louise nodded her head,

“Then, I’ll drink a little too. Can you accompany me? If it’s one person drinking, don’t you think it' s boring”

“Eh?”

For a moment, Louise was confused but before she could answer, the girl walked carelessly into the shop and she had to chase after her.

“I’m called Jeanette. What’s your name?”

They gave a toast as the girl called Jeanette asked Louise for her name. Louise stare at Jeanette. other then their hair, eyes, and clothing, the two girls didn't look too different.

However……she can use magic but is not a noble... a Mercenary or something.

But, looking at how she dresses up, she does not look like a mercenary. Who is she?

Noticing that Louise was staring at her suspiciously, Jeanette smiled.

“Relax. I’m not going to do anything to you. I am only trying to find someone to spend my time with”

Although suspicious ... but it seems she really had no other motives. In short, she doesn’t seem to look like she knows Louise's own identity.

Louise faint from this girl who exudes dangerous air feel care. Although it seems older and own similar, but the even in suspicious Sakai none of her fear color stride. Guests around from time to time to steal a glance look here, but not seen as just now come entanglement. Seems to be overwhelmed by Jeanette have momentum like.

“I’m called……Vanessa”

No matter if she didn't give out her real name, Louise gave a fake name. This is the name of a popular actress in the past. It just happened that the actress’s photo was posted on the wall.

Jeanette looked at Louise’s face.

”I keep feeling that I’ve seen you before……must be an illusion”

Five days earlier, Louise and Jeanette past by each other at the street of Des

Ornières. The woman that Saito was trying to catch up with, was the exact same Louise seen here and now.

But, already having the commission stopped(T/L: Not really sure, here is Chinese: ), for a long time her memory of the woman was fading, and she only remembered the hair color, and the lady present had used magic to dye her hair tea colored, so it was improbable for her to recognize her as the same person from before.

Louise , on the other hand was, at that point of time not in the mood to pay attention to these details so it is impossible to remember. You might say that she did not even notice that she passed by Jeanette.

“I think so. I have no impression of you”

Is it because of some reason she had come to find her? Louise secretly thought. Is she a Romalian spy or a detective that Saito hired to find her? She gave herself this answer.

But if that is the case, she would not say "seems to have seen you before", that kind of words. It should be that she is pretending not to have any relationship.

This sentence of Jeanette won over Louise’s trust.

And ..... Louise wanted to find someone to talk to. If this goes on she would only feel more and more lonely, drinking alone was also boring. The hearty mysterious girl in front of her is the suitable candidates to chat with. “Can you say your name one more time?”

“V-Vanessa”

“Fake, right? You’re not really good at lying”

“N-no, it isn’t a fake name……I am the idling Vanessa. The notorious Vanessa. I just arrived here!”

Louise sips the wine with a guilty expression.

“You are not a noble?”

Pu! Louise spit her drink out.

“No. I’m a bad woman. Bad! Woman!”

“I completely couldn’t tell. Because you…… “

Jeanette licked Louise’s cheek suddenly.

"That one did not know it right? Taste and smell can understand. You’re giving off the taste only a noble’s daughter of the  can have”

Louise’s face turned red. Taste can understand……What’s going on? Although regarding to this kind of mysterious person she felt a keen sense of admiration, but regarding to the questions that were asked a feeling of shame overrode it.

“O-of course I know! Every day we sleep and talk together!”

“But, did he hug you before?”

Jeanette moved her face closer again.

“A noble like you is actually drinking alone in a place like this with weird dressing. In other words, you were dumped by that person. Or, you witnessed an affair scene? Oh, Oh, don’t tell me it is only a one-sided love? You felt restless and in the heat of the moment, you ran away from home. In order to prevent the search party to find your whereabouts, you dressed up like this. Is that the case?”

Her words hit a raw nerve; Louise's mind became blank despite a desperate attempt to cover up.

“D- don’t be stupid. If you want to be a fortune teller, you still have time. Go do it somewhere else”

“There is no need to hide it. There are two reasons for a young lady of your age to run away from their home. Falling out of love or had a fight with her parents. Only one of two. But, if it’s a fight with parents, you would not be drinking wine. It’s falling out of love, right?”

Jeanette laughed. Looks like this girl dressed in black and white is sharp. Louise turned her head to the side slowly.

“So what do you want? The thick-skinned Vanessa is very busy. I have no time to chat nonsense with a person like you. Just now, thank you. Now then, I’ll be leaving”

Louise kept feeling a sense of uneasiness, she wanted to stand.

Suddenly, her wrist was grabbed by Jeanette. Jeanette only stared intently at

Louise. This tight gaze made Louise felt oppressed.

“You, I’m fond of you”

She could not help but feel her chest thumping hard. Louise tried very hard to suppress the strong heartbeats. W-what……the other party is a girl……

Nevertheless, Jeanette still exudes a certain charm. In this danger, she felt like she remembered something. It was her first time to encounter such a person, Louise was interested in her again.

“The risk of whatever and something whatever, does not matter. It already does not matter” Louise sat back in her chair.

“Well, cheers”

Jeanette touched the cup

“Ehis it so. As the best friend of a friend ……This really is a big blow”

“Yes. That kind of woman ……only her allure is enough to see. Obviously her work is not something fantastic but she still has an arrogant look! Then that idiot……did not have any resistance to that dangerous allure. Well, that idiot had no idea”

Louise poured out all her complaints without thinking. She had already referred to Henrietta as ’That kind of woman’.

“Hug L-like this on the bed. Like this! Tightly! Don’t joke! W-Who does she think she is!”

Louise stomped on the floor angrily.

“Then he place his lips L-like this..... what exactly are they doing~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~! So enchanted ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~! Incredible! T-that woman actually ... said 'best friend' ... what kind of best friend! If stealing someone else's boyfriend is necessary to be a best friend why don’t you say you’re desperately releasing hormones here and there? To tell you the truth, it’s just trouble. If you have so much time, go do your job properly! This kind of thing- do it when you’re alone in the room, release as much as you like there.”

Her anger rose higher. Once she has spoken it out, Louise could not stop. One sentence followed by another, curses were spat out.

Then as if to quell her anger, Louise poured wine into her throat. Of course, although she cannot stop talking, she was not so foolish as to say the name of the duo.

Jeanette smiled at Louise who was venting her anger,

“The friendship between women is not reliable”

“Yes……it really is like that”

“But that’s okay. Let me be your friend”

Jeanette went closer to Louise. Louise winced slightly. This girl……don’t tell me, is not the same?

Didn’t I hear this before?

Obviously a girl, yet she likes girls……

“W-what are you doing?”

Wanting to change the subject, Louise inquired. Indeed, she cared about this.

“That……how should I put it. Well, something close to a House of everything?”

“House of everything?”

“Hehe, Yes. As long as it is commissioned, it is basically acceptable”

Jeanette smiled as if she was implying something. House of everything? What is that? What kind of person?

“Only one person doing it?”

“A few brothers working together. Right now, big brother is negotiating the commissioned work. Only I am asked to wait on this street. Really! My brothers always treat me like a child! How rude!”

Jeanette sulked. This expression made Louise felt a sense of closeness. She remembered being treated as a child too, including having anger issues……

However, this kind of feeling seems to have been a very long time ago. After shedding tears, memories like this ... it feels like someone else's story.

To the Louise who was dwelling in her past memories, Jeanette said in a pleasant voice.

“Do you have something you want to do?”

“Eh?”

“For example, revenge……I especially like you, so I’m giving you a special discount”

“What are you saying? Don’t joke”

“I’m not joking……Anyway, what are you going to do next?”

Louise whispered with a sigh.

“Yes……I would like to go to a place where no one knows who I am, no one is to disturb my quiet days. But, this is difficult”

“Wait a while” , after Jeanette finished saying that, she looked thoughtful

“Erm——In factI remember such a place……where is it?”

“R-really?”

Louise cannot help but ask.

“In the past, there was once an illegitimate child who was sent there. It will definitely adhere to your conditions.”

“Where?”

“Erm--It’s over there……I don’t quite remember. I would like to ask my brothers, to know. They will come within two to three days, let’s wait here”

# Chapter 3: Meeting and Comrade

After about a week, Tristainia's palace gave a reply, at the same time, the Knight Corps of The Water Spirit began to gather together. Saito’s letter "Have you seen Louise?” shocked everyone. Guiche used the dragon’s cage to fly directly from Tristania's western end of the Grammont’s territory so he was not late.

In the vestibule of the palace landing, Caldecott , who had been promoted to captain for the whole magic guards, came out to welcome Guiche.

“Grammont-sama. Great timing.”

“What happened? I heard Louise was missing or something like that……”

"I do not quite understand ... In all, you see, is she not a person related to the state secrets? So we are commanded to start secret investigations ..."

“So you are saying you haven’t found her yet?”

Caldecott replied with a nod.

“Speaking of which, where’s Saito”

“This, ah, you’re talking about Vice-captain Saito……He is really giving us a headache”

“What do you mean?”

“He is currently undergoing a strange ceremony in the courtyard. He, himself is muttering “worry” something about yes or no ……”

Guiche wondered. Exactly how was even Saito not his usual self? In short, in order to be able to understand the incident in detail, Guiche rushed into the garden first.

When Guiche reached the courtyard, he saw Malicorne and Reynald. Their home was not far from here, and it seemed like they arrived here early.

“Yo, you two. What happened to Saito?” After asking, Malicorne pointed with his finger.

On his head wrapped in a white sash, Saito was sitting in the center of the courtyard in a straight position. Surrounding him were a few round standing stakes. A little distance away, Siesta, with a wondrous expression, was also sitting.

“What is that guy doing?”

“I also don’t understand. He said it was for ‘exercising the body and mind ‘or something”

Time passed by a little. The observing Guiche and the others felt the tension in the air. The moment Guiche swallowed his saliva ……Saito’s shoulders moved a little, his right hand reaching towards the left flank of the sword.

The moment his hand touched the sword ……Saito upper body was straight, his knees touched the ground. At the same time, his right hand vanished. Whoosh! The sound of air being cut, the four round stakes around Saito trembled. Lastly, "qiang" a clear sound resounded through the surroundings. He thought he had pulled out his sword, but the sword remained sheathed.

That really was fast, Guiche who was watching on the sides did not understand what happened.

“What? That!”

“That guy took out his sword with a speed the naked eye cannot keep up with, and broke the round stakes!”

What was surprising is that the upper part of the round wood stakes did not fall to the ground, it was still in the lower half of the above. It was hard to tell from the upper part and the lower half that the four round stakes were severed perfectly.

"He drew his sword? But, the sword is still sheathed?"

Guiche finished with a silly voice, Reynald shook his head.

“He drew the sword out, cut off the stakes and then kept the sword in the scabbard again. It is said that this is the sword skills of his country. ”

Seemingly in the blink of an eye, Saito completed all this. He really is a ‘sword master’,said Guiche, deeply moved.

“Well. It is impressive but what has that sword skill got to do with worrying over Louise’s disappearance?”

“Only God knows.”

Next, Saito resumed the straight position. Siesta stood up and rushed up to Saito's side to wipe the sweat from his forehead.

It’s about time, Guiche walked over to Saito.

Saito did not take a glance at his friends nearby; he just kept staring in front in a daze.

“Yo, Saito. What happened? It is said that Louise is missing?”

“Where is the sword you usually carry? I have never seen that sword on your waist before ...”

Saito bit his lips.

“Derf he……that guy……to protect me……Damn!”

“Protect you? What happened?”

“He……in the battle absorbed too much magic……”

“I beg your pardon! How inharmonious! Exactly who attacked you!”

The boys leaned nearer to Saito.

“Don’t know. Just that they are a duo of magic users”

The boys nodded their heads at Saito’s reply.

"Well, it appears to be a hired assassin. How nerve-racking, you seem to make enemies too much recently ...”

“He is a big celebrity”

“and what has this got to do with Louise’s disappearance?” Gimli asked worriedly

Everyone looked at Saito with a wondrous expression; Saito slams his fist into the ground. Siesta continued from where her master left off.

“No. Miss Valliere’s disappearance has nothing to do with the incident where Saito-san was attacked”

Siesta thought her words carried some anger. She stole a glance at Saito before squatting down to peep at his face.

“Hey, Saito-san. How do you feel?”

“My mind is destroyed, my worry disappearing, my mind is destroyed, my worry disappearing, my mind is destroyed, my worry disappearing ……”

Saito grumbled constantly with a mutter.

“Looks like the person wearing pajamas is very powerful. That lady, after all, must be full of sexiness and touching. Her chest is much, much bigger than mine and her figure must be stunning”

Siesta tighten Saito's neck.

“If you want to cheat, you can always look for me! I have obviously told you that! We promised! Why does Saito-san only like noble girls! The aroma of the pitiful flowers by the roadside should also be carefully admired!”

“Speaking of which, who is the other person?” Guiche’s seems to suspiciously inquire. Siesta’s eyes turned into a one []sign and she started breaking out in cold sweat. If Guiche knew the truth he would most certainly faint.

The two did not answer, Guiche had no choice but to wave his hand.

“Well, whoever it is. You're a hopeless man. You should at least learn from me. At least”

Because Guiche uttered those words, Reynald spat at the ground.

“If he learns from you, Louise will definitely run away everyday”

Saito helped by Siesta, slowly stood up. Then, slickly he greeted Guiche.

“Anyway, thanks for specially coming for me.”

Saito expressed a smiling face that looked almost ready to cry out in pain. Making an effort to be happy——his voice revealed this kind of feeling.

“No, Well, I have nothing much to do anyway……”

“Speaking of which, Louise didn’t go over to your side?”

“Nope”

“That means she hasn't been found temporarily……Siesta, Tristinia’s inns have all been searched right?”

“Yes. Including monasteries, I have looked before”

These past seven day, after Saito prepared his practice of exercising his heart, he searched Tristinia’s hotels again. The team of soldiers who had nothing to do was sent out to search, but they could not even find Louise's shadow. This is obvious, after all, Louise went to Torres Thalia, a completely different direction ...

The letter, ’Have you seen Louise?’, that Saito mailed usually received replies such as ‘have not seen her’.

Cattelya’s letter has also been received. She did not intend to hide anything so she immediately said the truth. Her answer is "She did not come back.

In the letter, she said that she was worried about the safety of Louise; and had reported this matter to her parents, they said that ‘that child will be back soon’

kind of optimistic speech; However, on this matter, she does not think so, she hoped Saito can think of ways to find Louise as soon as possible...

When reading this letter, Saito cried. Nothing written on it blamed Saito.

‘The mistake I made is causing so much trouble to many people’, Saito’s state of mind weighed heavily on his shoulders.

Even though Saito said “it will be okay if we search", he did not find Henrietta to discuss about it. Louise is not just a female officer. Firstly, whether it is Tristain or to Halkeginia, her presence itself is very important, a void user. If she was kidnapped by Romalia, things would be serious. Therefore, Saito put all the nobles who had nothing to do into the search team.

They searched the markets and streets along Tristainia.

Considering Louise’s point of view, she will be more responsible for her own actions but this action of hers is taken too lightly.

Having said that, Saito and Henrietta was not blamed by Louise. He and Henrietta were obviously in the wrong ...

“Okay. If that’s the case, she is not at Tristania ……then, we should search the street along the hotel next. Perhaps the search team missed something……”

After Saito finished speaking, Siesta nodded her head in agreement.

“We will help as well”

Saito held tightly the hand of the friend that said that sentence, who had a look of worry on her face.

"I'm sorry ... really sorry. Then, I’ll be troubling you. I owe you a favour"

At this moment, a soft voice came from the corridor.

“Saito!”

Turning his head to look behind, Tiffania, who was always dressed in a green dress, wearing a wide-brimmed hat on her head ran over.

“Huff huff, I heard that Louise went missing……is that true?”

Tiffania spent her summer holidays at the Tristainia’s orphanage.

“While I was on a picnic with everyone, I received a letter suddenly and almost jumped up in shock. What happened?”

Great, just when everyone was thinking how to answer, Colbert-sensei and Kirche came from the direction of the main entrance.

“Aiya Aiya, I finally found out the use of the" tank "method after reaching Miss (Sheffield)’s house to reform but ... I received your letter of Miss Valliere gone. What happened?"

Saito painfully replied to Colbert’s inquiry.

“I……about that, with another girl, that ……lips touching scene, she……”

Colbert, although stunned at that moment , folded his arms and nodded.

“I see what this is all about……You are still young, so if you can’t control it’s understandable, but……she is thus wounded in her heart”

Kirche put her hands around separately and said helplessly.

“Really, this is why I told her seriously. I said ‘It’s tough being a woman’ ”

Tiffania looked at Saito with a gaze full of wrath. Malicorne went over and greeted Tiffania politely.

“Girls, regarding this incident, please say your feelings”

Tiffania stated reasonably.

“Saito is really bad. Louise is pitiful”

Saito could not help but fall on the spot.

“Ah, AhAhAhAhAhAh……AhAhAh……”

“Use language to whip him again.An unpopular guy with the occasional set of achievements became slightly popular, then degenerated into this kind of junk. A momentously proud fool disclosing such a big basketHey buddy, don’t forget what position you’re in now…… You upstart jerk ……”

Malicorne lifted his eyebrows, trampling on Saito non-stop. Malicorne was picky towards popular topics. sob, sob……Saito cried in shame. Saito is inconsolable when he is depressed

Kirche said with a tilted head.

“But……who is the rival?”

“This guy would not talk about that” Malicorne said while stepping on Saito’s back.

“Ah, but that Louise ran away from home – it is said so, but even sweet-talking the servant wouldn't make her mad like this. That’s why I am very concerned about it. It is possible that the other party is quite close to him ... sort of?”

At this moment, Guiche and Reynald’s eyes had a sudden change.

“You, the other person couldn’t be Montmorency right?”

“Can’t be (Brigitte) right?”

“N-not Miss (Janice), right?”

(Gimli) interrupted Reynald.

“So you like that type of girl”

“No! That’s not it! I’m only asking!”

Reynald whose face flushed red shouted. In such a commotion, Saito shook his head.

“……Not any of them”

“Then who is it! You’re making people care more about this!”

Seeing Guiche and the others surrounding Saito, Kirche tilted her head.

“What’s wrong?”

Colbert, who was beside her, asked Kirche.

“No……Don’t tell me. Even though this is my girl’s instinct”

“Your instincts are pretty accurate. Let’s hear it”

Kirche whispered the name she thought of into Colbert’s ear.

“How can that be?”

“No……Because, if Louise can do this kind of thing, the other party must be a reliable person, no wonder I can think this up”

After Kirche used the sound of chewing something bitter to point this out, Colbert should not be beginning to think that it is not to be true right? But, it can’t be ……

She is also this country's Her Highness the Queen, how could this be possible!

But looking at Saito’s popularity that is not completely impossible. Although she is a queen, Henrietta is also just an eighteen year old pretty girl. If she steals the heart of the most popular of knights, we can’t blame her.

Also……aren’t Louise and Henrietta really close together? If that is the case, why would Louise run away from her home, Saito not mentioning the other party’s name can be understood. After all, that name is not easy to say out.

Colbert felt the back of his head breaking out in cold sweat as he realized he might be witnessing a historic scandal.

If this incident is made public, someone will die. This so-called royal scandal cannot be overlooked.

Who is it! Say it! Watching the fired up boys, Colbert pretended to be calm while clapping his hands and saying,

“Ah——everyone. Right now the other party is not important, finding Miss Valliere is our most important task at hand. Don’t you think so too?”

Well, that makes sense; the boys nodded and went towards the stables. Guiche was scratching his head while talking to Saito who was dusting dirt off his knees,

“Hey Saito”

“What?”

“We can search for her. If we find her, what do you plan——to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“No, it’s nothing. Louise has her own way of thinking. If she says she doesn’t want to be with you, what do you plan to do?”

Saito considered this for a while. Then he said in a voice filled with loneliness,

“When that time comes, we’ll see. Anyway, I want to see and apologise to her now”

Although Guiche was silent for a moment, he said, with a not interested expression,

“Well, okay”

A change of view, at this time Louise was at the "mainland of beluga whales" pavilion with Jeanette, waiting for her brother. Although "Lu's Moby Dick" Pavilion was not classy, it was also not a cheap inn, it was very suitable for hiding. They rented one of the rooms.

While Louise drank wine, she emptied out all her discontent to Jeanette. Like a burst dam, Louise flooded all her thoughts to her. Jeanette, too, looked happy as she listened to Louise speaking her mind.

“Then? Are you listening, Jeanette?”

Louise's voice had loosened up long ago. In two days’ time, with the boost of wine, Louise had exhausted all her tension and suspicion.

“I’m listening”

“That guy, told me in this way. That the one I love is you! Like that! Numerous times! With an expression like this! It obviously is like that! Of all things, he kissed with my close friend, What——is——the meaning of this! Right!”

“Geez, that kind of cheater might as well die”

Jeanette giggled while Louise nodded.

“You also——think this way? A-a-a-about that pervert dog! When f-facing me, p-put on t-this kind of expression, w-wanting to say to do ‘It’! Hey…hey!”

Louise was so angry that she choked and thus, coughed straight away.Jeanette passed a wine bottle to her. After Louise drank finished, her eyes faint, she fell.

After about 5 minutes of being motionless, she suddenly leap up.

“He did the same thing with o-other women! He said he would only do that with me! If I think about it now, I would have an earth-shaking headache! That liar!”

Then she fell down again. Jeanette got up and took the water jug on the table, pouring the water over Louise’s face. Thus, Louise leaped up once more and stared blankly at Jeanette.

“Hey Jeanette, why do I feel like I said a lot of embarrassing stuff”

“You did not” Jeanette’s expression was candid.

“Then never mind”

After Louise deeply sighed

“When are your brothers coming. I’m tired of waiting”

The siblings of Jeanette know a place to "live in seclusion ",so Louise waited. It was almost past two days.

“What’s wrong? Let’s just wait patiently”

A slightly drunk Louise told Jeanette her doubts truthfully.

“But, why would you be so affectionate to me, who you never met before?”

“Because I like you”

On Jeanette’s face appeared a smile. A pretty face like a doll. Also, like a doll, a feeling of coldness ……

Then, Jeanette lifted Louise's chin with her hand.

"Because, you are so cute. Arrogant but easily hurt, as for those pair of straight forward eyes……you're not just cute, you also give people the feeling of wanting to violate you"

"Eh? Eh? Eh?"

Seeing Louise's wide round eyes, Jeanette grabbed a handful of Louise's hair, using it to itch her own nose.

"and this fine……beautiful hair. Just like a doll. A child like you should be called a real maiden"

The person just like a doll should be you, Louise wanted to say ……but she did not say it.

The doubt Louise felt before began to swell.

This girl……is really the girl that has a special interest in other girls foretold in the legend?

Obviously a girl and yet she likes girls. That kind of special character exists, Louise know. In the Magic Academy, such rumors can be heard more than once.

Hence that's why she is so affectionate towards me, isn't that so?

Well, she does not look like a Romalian minion ……the feeling surrounding Jeanette gave people the impression that she puts her faith in god in the furthest position.

Obviously is like that, she also treats me affectionately.

If that is the case……as expected……she is a person with this special interest?

"……"

Louise looked at Jeanette with squinted eyes. Snow white skin like the dessert during late at night. Those two slender emerald eyes, like a moonlit oasis under the moonlight.

How beautiful, Louise was mesmerized for a moment. So Jeanette put on a serious expression.

“What can I enjoy??”

She asked something. Due to saying out her overly naive “What snacks can I enjoy?” feeling so Louise almost inadvertently nodded her head.

“No! Cannot! What are you saying!”

Jeanette laughed with a ‘Hahahahaha!’.

“Ah——what a pity! To you, I would really do it! Well, You really are the type that does not rely on strategies. I like you more and more now”

Looks like she’s playing with me. Louise argued,

“I’m naive anyway” she mumbled.

At this moment, there was a knock at the door. Jeanette’s expression quickly switched to one that was alert.

“……your brother?”

Jeanette shook her head and without hesitation; put a hand on the wand that was on the pillar.

“We’re the country’s military patrol! Open the door!”

That voice made Jeanette stole a glance at Louise. Her expression showed that she had woken from her drunken state. With a smile on her lips, Jeanette opened the door.

Standing over there are two nobles with non-commissioned officers identities.

A noble “two groups, huh……” she whispered to herself.

“What’s happening?”

Jeanette inquired,

“Nothing much……we are just searching for someone important”

From the wands in their hands, Jeanette guessed they were nobles so she used an elegant conduct to talk to these men.

“Someone important? (There really is discord in a troubled world) ”

“Lady, what are you doing here?”

“I am waiting for the arrival of my brothers with my maid”

She said with a pretended expression that she knew nothing. The patrol looked at Louise. Then after comparing with a portrait,

“……in the portrait is a peach blonde haired noble girl”

“And the looks of a person. This lady with the maid”

Based on appearances, they deduce that this person what not what they were searching for.

After the “excuse me” and greetings, the noble patrol left the room. Louise was so assured that she cannot help but sigh.

That’s right, those nobles from before were looking for me. Looks like dyeing my hair, doing such a degrading dress-up was not wasted. Sure enough……alas, Henrietta seemingly mobilized the search patrol to look for me.

Thinking this, Louise’s built up cold anger began to increase.

If I had known this earlier……why would I think of striking him. At this time, are Henrietta and Saito regretting their actions?

I estimate that they are desperately searching for me, she imagined the two of them. Even so, as expected…… I still don’t want to go back.

“Looks like you’re not an easy person”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

Jeanette muttered while playing with Louise's hair.

“You dyed before. The original color, what is it ……blonde? Red? or ……is it peach blonde?”

“……T-that is”

“Those people are looking for you, right? You ought to thank me. I helped you to smooth things over!”

Louise's feelings immediately surfaced on her face, she bit her lip and lowered her head.

“Forget it. Who you are doesn’t matter to me. In any case, you escaped. Isn’t that good? What I mean is, you need not bother. You don’t have to care about what I mean”

She has no idea what to say up to this point. Louise weakly thanked her,

“Thank you”

Looking at such a straightforward Louise, Jeanette smiled.

“Geez, with such a natural girl like you he still cheated, I can’t believe that man”

“I say, I'm not natural. Do not look at this, but I am the Vanessa who has experienced a lot of things...”

"I said it before; do not mention those trivial things. But, why do you want to escape? You’re such a cute lady; any man will come back soon. Just like just now, didn’t he put in a lot of effort in searching for you? "

Louise bent her head, closed her eyes and said in a lonely voice.

“……that person, her charm is better than mine by several times. So I admit it. Also, she has too many enemies. That person……can have many more superb means of protecting him than me”

Jeanette stared at Louise with sympathy.

“You really like him. Exactly what kind of person is he? I am very concerned ...”

Louise grabbed a bottle of wine, and poured its contents into a cup. Listlessly

she supported her arm and elbow on the table, muttering

“I don’t like him. Really, I don’t like him one bit”

Tears welled up in Louise's eyes. Flowing down from the eyes of Louise.

“I don’t like him. Don’t……”

Jeanette hugged Louise’s shoulder as she was sobbing.

“Such a weird child. Why do you have no confidence in yourself? Obviously so cute…and…”

Jeanette’s lips neared Louise’s neck. Then, she licked gently.

“... With taste I know. You really have an unimaginable power, no wonder I liked you from the start”

However, Jeanette’s words did not reach the crying Louise’s ears.

# Chapter 4: Sulpice

Saito and company divided into three groups, each heading towards the three paths leading away from Tristain to search for Louise.

First was Rolan Street, from La Vallière to Germania. The other path was Gryphon Street, forking out to La Rochelle.

The last route was Vell-El Street, along the shoreline to Gallia.

Kirche and Colbert went along Rolan Street to Germania while Gimli and Reynald walked along Gryphon Street.

On the other hand, the path through Des Ornières was thought to the most likely path that was taken, so Saito, Siesta, Guiche, Malicorne and Tiffania took it. If Louise did not want to go to Tristain.....Everyone thought that she might be on this street.

Henrietta expressed her hopes that they return in a fortnight. If they failed.....they must hurry back to Tristain.

On the morning of the eighth day after losing Louise's trail, Saito and company had already ridden out to search. Since they rode out at full speed, they went past Des Ornières and reached the first town past it with an inn by afternoon. Of course, it was also where Louise had stayed before, but Saito and Co. did not know that.

It was a tiny town so they were able to find a suitable place to stay immediately. However, there was not any news of Louise there.

"Louise didn't come here, did she.....?"

While Guiche was saying that, Tiffania pointed to an inn and said, "There's another inn there."

It was a dilapidated wooden hut made out as an inn. Siesta shook her head and said, " I can't imagine how Miss Louise would want to stay in such a place."

"Yeah, it's easy to see why," while saying that, Malicorne stretched his hands towards Tiffania's breasts. Shrieking in surprise, Tiffania jumped back and glared maliciously at Malicorne.

"Y-You'll get scolded by your girlfriend!"

"That's fine, let her rant all she wants, she already takes me as a sand bag anyway. Piggy, piggy, that's how she calls me. Piggy, piggy, hovering forwardly....."

Malicorne approached Tiffania slowly. Tiffania looked as if she wanted to cry.

Siesta used a frying pan to whack Malicorne's head. Bam, bam, bam.....until Malicorne laid on the ground rolling his eyes.

Zoning all of those out, Saito just looked at the wooden hut. If it was the normal Louise, she couldn't have lived there, right. But the Louise now.....isn't the "normal" Louise.

"Hey, hey!" Seeing Saito advancing slowly towards that inn, Guiche tried to stop him.

"Let's just give it a shot."

Seeing the mantle-wearing Saito, the customers in the inn bar turned to look at him. The scent of cheap beer, burnt meat, and the odor of men mixed around the bar so much that it was a little revolting. Apart from those, there was a hint of cigarettes and pipe around.

The innkeeper, who was heating a tea-colored beer, glanced at Saito for a while before turning away.

"I'd like to ask if there was a petite noble girl who came here just a few days ago?"

However, the innkeeper answered with a shake of his head.

"Saito, let's go," Guiche was saying, but Saito sat on a chair and placed one gold coin on the counter. Glancing at the gold coin, the innkeeper said,"What would you like?"

"No.....I'm just saying that if you know anything, this thing's yours." Saito said, troubled.

The innkeeper silently put down a beer bottle and said, "My job doesn't include being a tourist guide and finding missing people."

Saying that, the bar was filled with laughter. Saito sighed, took the bottle and finished the beer in one gulp.

"Let's go." Saito stood.

"Wait." The innkeeper called out to Saito who was leaving.

"The girl you're looking for. Is she this tall, a pink-hair-amber-eye petite noble girl?"

"Yes! That's her!" Saito unconsciously moved towards the counter.

"If that was her, she stayed here for a while before."

"Is this true?"

"Lying doesn't pay."

"Did she say anything?"

"Nothing. Everyday she locks herself up in the room. Even I can't stand it anymore. She left when I told her that this wasn't a place for nobles to say. That was about 3 or 4 days ago."

"Do you know where did she go?"

"This, I have no idea."

Saito thanked the innkeeper. Just as he was about to leave the inn, the innkeeper's voice carried from behind.

"You're the first noble to drink my beer, you know."

Saito turned back and said while clutching his mantle, "Even with this, I still can't look like a noble. I guess that's why she left."

Everybody gathered around Saito who just exited the inn.

"Louise seems to have stayed here before."

"Oh! However, why would it be such a horrible place....."

"Maybe she ran out of money." Even if he was saying like that, but he still can understand how Louise felt. The shock that she experienced was enough to let her think that the place that she was living in does not matter at all.

"It seems that choosing this route was right after all, let's continue quickly. Ah, right, use your owl to notify the others."

It was originally discussed that once one of them found Louise's trails, they should immediately use an owl to tell the others about it. They prepared an carrier owl that can carry messages to people with the corresponding magic talisman. Saito roughly outlined their situation in the letter and sent it to Kirche and Colbert. He tied the letter to the owl's leg and let go of it. The owl flew away with a flap of its wings.

"Riding from here for half a day, there will be a town called Sulpice," said Malicorne.

"It's quite a big town." Guiche nodded.

"Okay, let's go there next."

Along the way, they changed many horses. By the time they reached Sulpice at 3.00 a.m., they were already exhausted. It's no wonder that they were so tired as they barely slept during the two-day journey.

"Let's just sleep first. No one can go too long without any sleep."

Sulpice was located on a street commonly found in Halkeginia, filled with inns and thousands of people. Not only hotels, all kinds of goods gathered here from

around the land. There was a market in the town square everyday, making it a very lively place. However, at that time around, there were not many people on the streets.

There were burning torches everywhere, illuminating streets that looked quite unsafe.

Even though there were about 20 hotels on the street, along with smaller residential houses, and wooden inns in the alleys, there were quite a large amount of hotels in the town. Nights in Tristain were always pitch-black, but this town had completely immersed itself in the shadows.

This darkness really did not help in finding Louise.

"You're right. Let's take a rest first. We'll search the hotels for Louise in the morning."

Saito and Company rushed to the nearest hotel. Even though it has the exaggerating name "Noble Feathers Inn", it was quite small inside and there was not much grandeur. However, as everybody was dead beat, they just simply chose two rooms, separating the males and females, before falling asleep soundly.

Even though he had climbed into his bed, Saito still couldn't fall asleep. Despite being extremely happy as he had found a clue about Louise whereabouts, could he really find her?

Putting that aside, once he found her, what if Louise didn't want to forgive him?

Until now, even if she was extremely angry, she had never left his side.

What should I do if she doesn't forgive me?

Saito just couldn't sleep no matter what, so he walked downstairs. There was no one in the bar, only light from the candles illuminating the surroundings. Taking a beer bottle from the rack, he placed one gold coin on the counter.

Saito started to drink beer gloomily alone.

As he was drinking, there was footsteps upstairs. Lifting his head, it was Guiche.

He took a glass from the rack and started drinking himself.

"Can't sleep?" Asked Guiche. Saito nodded.

"Yup."

"However, what was Louise trying to do? Really, that willful Louise wanting to live alone is impossible. Maybe she went to some monastery, sneaked into some rich guy's place or even become some other guy's lover?"

Saito's face darkened. He muttered,"Stop it. You really are a hypocrite! Having affairs yourself but can't stand the notion of others doing the same thing."

Hearing this, Guiche put on a troubled face.

"I'm just joking. Anyhow, what really happened?"

"Hey, Guiche.....really what kind of person am I?.....I really like Louise very much, but I just can't resist the charms of other girls....."

Seeing Saito saying that while holding his head in his hands, Guiche just simply said,"Isn't that normal?"

"That's for you to say....."

"Not only me, aren't you the same? That's why you kissed some noble girl right? This isn't wrong or right, you're just someone like that. What are you so upset about?"

Saito, hearing this, still shook his head.

"I-if it was like that, didn't I become a liar.....so many times that I've said that I only like you(Louise)....."

"You're supposed to think like that when you're saying that. I'm the same, it's not a lie. No matter the time, I always felt that I was true to heart then. It's something like 'You're the most important!'."

"But isn't this simply an excuse?"

"Excuse?! Hey,hey, don't say such stupid things. How many charming women

are there out there in the world? Our feelings for them are true. You're saying that this is an excuse? No! Facing such powerful charm, we're powerless to resist. It's just that simple."

"B-but....."

Speaking to Saito, who was still hugging his head, Guiche said,"Be more truthful to yourself."

"Hah? I'm very truthful! Truthful enough to be troubled by this!"

"Let me say this straight. You do not get yourself troubled over being powerless to womanly charms. Just guarantee this. All you need to be troubled is only one thing. And that is not wanting to be hated by Louise."

Saito's face turned pasty. He sobered up immediately. Guiche has hit the bull's eye.

"Am I right? Somewhere in your heart is thinking 'oh, that's completely the point' ,yeah? How to justify your actions, and more importantly how to let Louise forgive you, you're thinking hard about these, right?"

"There's nothing like that! How did it turn out this way!" Saito yelled while banging the table. Guiche turned serious.

"That's because I'm like that. Even though I'm a bit strange, but I'm very sensitive towards the charms of women. Once I've seen a beautiful woman, I'll lose myself in her.....but even though it's me, I know that I have a problem. I already have Montmorency, don't I? You may think that I am that daft and carefree, but it isn't so. I'm also very troubled."

Saying this, Guiche finished the beer in one gulp. Like a started engine, he started to speak more forcefully.

"That's why for some time, I stopped associating myself with beautiful women. Of course, I did it perfectly. When was it.....it's before I met you, let's leave it at that. At that time, I kept myself to Montmorency.....even when there was a beautiful woman walking by, I just thought, "Yeah, she's very pretty." That's it. Nothing said, nothing done. Days gone by just doing that."

Saito adjusted his pose and listened attentively to Guiche.

"However, that was unnatural. The spark in my soul started to wither.....even talking to Montmorency was taken to be granted. At last, she even told me, "You said the same thing yesterday!" I started to think, isn't this something very "unnatural"! The spark in my soul started to disappear."

Guiche placed his hands onto Saito's shoulders.

"Where do you actually feel the "charm"?"

"Eh? eh eh?"

"Where do you think the "charm" you feel in charming women is?"

"I-in the h-heart?"

"Yes! It's your heart! However, who is the one who creates it? It's God! The God in your heart created it! Even the charming women are created by God! What's wrong with praising them? If feeling that something beautiful is beautiful was a crime, then go condemn God! Even if it were so, I'm still a devout Brimir follower. I'll never do anything against the edict of God. And that why I'll follow the edict of God."

"So, you just simply hook yourself up with any girl with charm?"

"Yup."

"I think you can just go kill yourself."

"What are you talking about!"

"Have you ever thought about Montmorency's feelings? For every one time you hit on other girls, she'll get hurt. Isn't this the reason why you got dumped before?"

"Of course. This is just my theory, not hers."

Guiche stopped abruptly and looked at Saito.

"And that's why I treated Montmorency with 10 times more care than other girls.

But really, even if it was so, it's not enough. But it's better than doing nothing at all. The Montmorency now will forgive me no matter what I do!"

"What kind of convoluted theory is that!"

"Hey hey, I think that's 100 times better than you fretting over something like 'why would I feel the charms of other girls'. This is unavoidable, isn't it? No, even you know it, don't you? Even if it were so, did you treat Louise gently?"

"Y-yeah, I did!" Saito exclaimed.

"Louise sure didn't felt that way. Your "gentleness" didn't make the cut. And that's why she left you."

"Err....."

Saito unconsciously started to curl himself up. Thinking back, wasn't trying to be gentle with her just ended up with him doing some strange things? He just said something like Lemon-chan, little kitty.....Louise did say that she likes a romantic guy, but what he was doing was.....

"Am I a pervert?"

At that time, someone spoke behind him.

"Nope. You're on the level of a "super-pervert."

"Malicorne!"

He came, wearing tidy pajamas and in hand holding a pillow.

"Walking around the hotel canteen with your pajamas." Saito was speaking like some tourist guide,

"What are you talking about? I was woken by your ruckus, you know." Malicorne grunted. "Nn, Guiche seems to be saying that "you weren't gentle with her" and that's why Louise left your side, right? I don't think so. From what I know, Saito, you did quite well."

"Really? I don't see anything....." Guiche expressed his doubt.

"He did good! You see, Guiche, the girl we're talking about here is Louise. Really, she's quite pretty, I know that. But what does she have? That figure! Slim and thin, she's like a washing board isn't she? She isn't a child anymore, and no 17-year-old girl looks like that, there's no one at all. Even so, if she was a little meek, she would be cute. But, what's with her? For every two sentences there's one with 'dog'. No matter how Saito endeavors he's still a dog. Heck, she should look in the mirror before saying those things. I'll just skip describing her personality."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah....." Guiche started to nod.

"Even with that Louise, Saito still treats her with care. Saying sweet things like she's the cutest Lemon-chan. I can swear that Louise doesn't deserve your treatment."

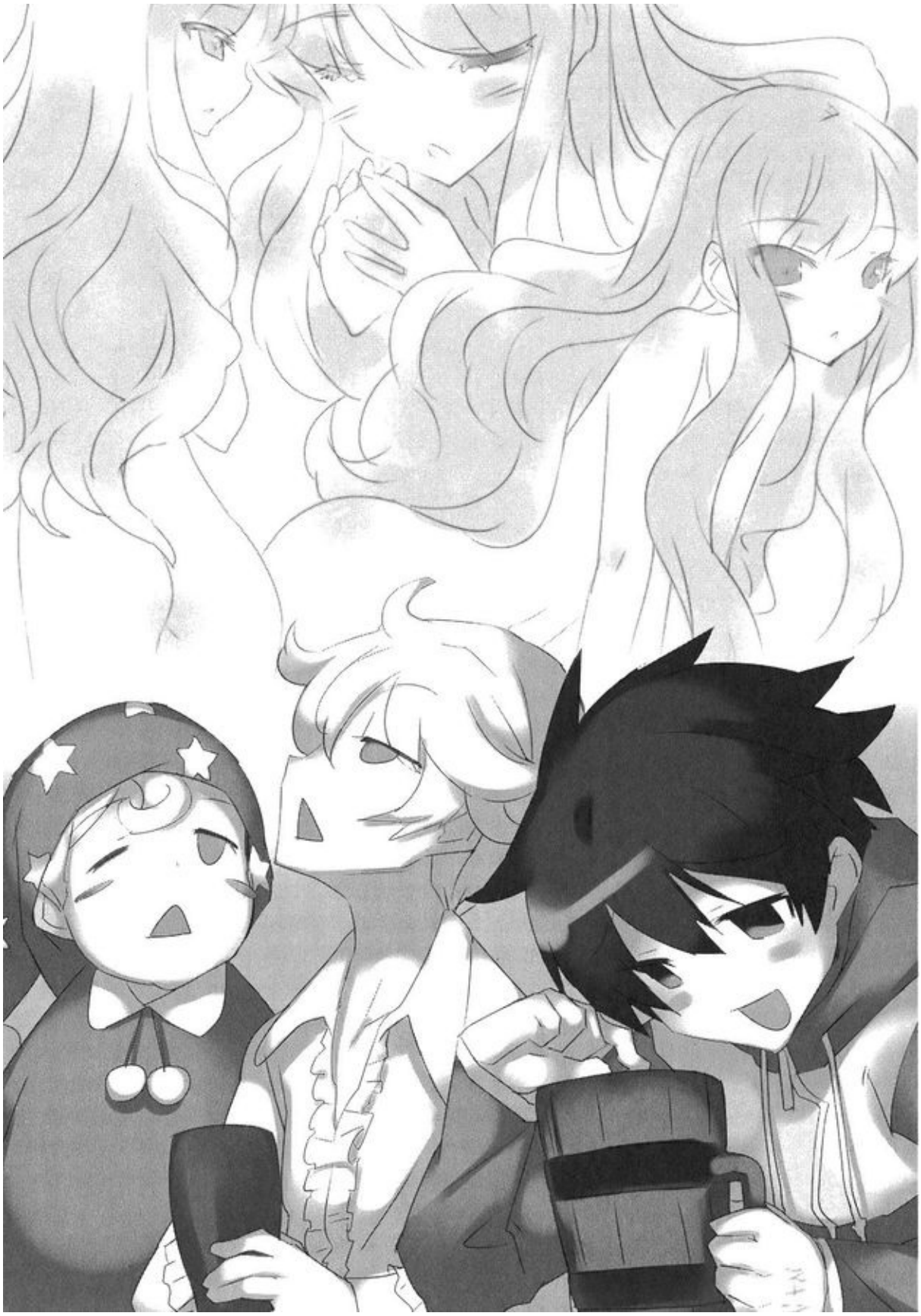
"Say.....you talking about another guy's lover like that....."

"I'm just saying! I'm always thinking, where does Louise's attraction lie? Saito, there's nothing to be ashamed of. You're not just any hero.(T/L:I'm assuming there's a mistranslation of Chinese here). No matter which girl she is, you'll easily get her. Even so, you've amazingly set your eyes only on Louise. Or even, unbelievably so. You just slightly looked at someone else and she left the house. That woman, who does she think she is?"

Saito banged the table and stood up, gripping Malicorne's collar.

"Fool! What do you know about Louise's cuteness! You don't know anything!"

"Eh? Where is she cute?"



"Even though normally her temper is really bad.....O-o-on the bed, she's really cute. She becomes very meek and docile, she'll hear anything I say." Saito said with a trembling voice.

"Really?"

"A-ah, didn't you hear about that Lemon-chan thing?"

"I did hear about it."

"Normally she wouldn't say it, right?"(T/L: not sure about the "she" there)

"Yeah, she wouldn't say it."

"So, that's the thing."

"Oh."

Saito then spoke dreamily, "Louise, in the morning she's just as you said.....arrogant and willful.....but, at night she's different.....even if she says something like I don't care, her eyes burn with anticipation. She'll cover herself with the sheet until just under the nose and look at me with shaky eyes, waiting for me to do something. Also, even if she looks like a washboard, she has very womanly figure. Her slim waist, the curve of her back is like it's carved by God. Even though all is small, except for her breasts the proportions are still quite perfect. It's hard to describe, but it's amazing. Aaaaaaah! I feel like doing it again and again!"

"You've done it?"

"N-not yet....."

"Pueh, that's a shame."

Because Malicorne leaked out laughter, Saito grabbed his collar again.

"You also haven't done it, have you! In any case, aren't you the one who keeps meddling!"

While making up a ruckus, they felt a cold gaze from behind.

Turning around, Tiffania and Siesta were standing behind them, glaring them with eyes of ice.

Malicorne coughed, and bowed towards Tiffania.

"Ladies, please state your thoughts."

"Saito's useless. Poor Louise," said Siesta coldly. "If you clearly experienced her charms, why did you still have an affair?"

"Ladies, please state the details of your thoughts."

"Saito's a piece of junk."

Saito hugged his head and groaned. Malicorne stepped on his head viciously.

"I say, I'm really a pervert! Louise was sure to leave if I'm like this!"

While being thrown to the rack and stepped on by Malicorne, Saito said sadly, "To such a cute Louise, what did I do to her....."

Thinking like this, what he had done would never be forgiven.

Tiffania then said angrily, "Saito, if the Louise you like so much had done the same thing to you, what would you think? What if Louise kissed another man? I think Saito would be really sad!"

It really was so. Saito was at a loss of words.

"Sorry....."

"You’re not supposed to apologize to me, but to Louise!"

Tiffania then turned to Guiche and Malicorne, "The both of you too! Simply stating your theories! What do you take girls to be?!"

Under the scoldings of the normally gentle Tiffania, Guiche and Malicorne started to mumble, "Sorry."

"Tiffania, you’re amazing....." Seeing Tiffania like this made Siesta's eyes teary.

"......Ah. Even though I’m a little embarrassed, I can’t just let it past. Because men are just too willful.....Saito."

"Here."

Saito sat straight at Tiffania's call.

“Say, Louise listening to whatever you say.....accepting those strange words but she didn’t get angry at all, right? That prideful Louise actually did that, right? I think that’s because she has trust in you, isn’t it so?"

“Really.....?"

His passion doused, Saito lowered his head. He never saw her get angry, but hearing of it from someone else, Louise’s pride and her token of heart popped up in his mind.

"Don’t think about how to get her forgiveness anymore."

Looking at the sunlight streaming in from the window, Saito thought so.

"I’ll try my best to apologize. Whether if she would forgive me or not, that’s something to think about later."

He readily put his foot down on this. However, not knowing of his new found determination, Malicorne continued to step on Saito’s head.

"Your face looks like you've understood everything. You’re really a pervert." Always taking advantage of the weak, Malicorne said so.

On the other side, on this morning.

At dawn, two riders appeared at the entrance to Sulpice. With their headscarves and grey robes, they looked like monks.

However, their conversation was nothing of the religious sort.

"Seriously! Brother Damien(T/L:the original is "big bro Damien" not sure which honorifics) is way too greedy. One hundred thousand Ecus! Isn’t that way more than enough? He actually wanted two hundred thousand Ecus....."

The shorter man said, troubled. Under the heavy headscarf was a young man with a face full of curiosity.

It’s actually Bleu, who tried to kill Saito a few days ago.(T/L: Bleu original name is )

"Our plan requires money, don’t you know that already?” On his side, the big brother gruffly said. He looks heavily muscled, unlike most mages. Even with the cape, his muscled body looks as if someone stuffed balloons under his skin.

"But, brother Jack, I think Damien rushed things a little. Isn’t it just fine before, even if we just got one hundred thousand Ecus, it’s still quite exceptional.”

"We just have to get more from those guys, anyways. Brother Damien’s bargaining skills are amazing! How was that target that gave you trouble?"

"Right! That fellow! His unexpected strength really scared me for a bit. He seems to be called Hiragi? Or Hirago.....anyway his name is something like that. His sword skills gave me quite a tough time. Even if he was just some hero, he didn’t seems to be bluffing.”

"That Hiragi is someone we must remove for the client. In any case, the only ones that can kill him is us. Our client will surely be convinced.”

“Is it so.....”

Bleu still looked glum. Jack glanced at his brother and said, “Let's put that aside now, where’s the inn Josette's staying in?”

“O-oh that.....”

“Hey! You didn’t forget the name of the inn, did you? The only person who can read Josette’s letter is you, you know! Think hard!”

“W-wait for a while!” Bleu’s face started to turn pasty.

“N-Nn.....this.....I still remembered it on the way here! It’s something with the sea, land, river.....or some name like that.....”

“You! Would anyone ever forget the name of the rendezvous?! If so, why didn’t

you let us see it before you threw it!”

"Brother, weren't you the one who asked me to throw away everything that may become information!”

Jack shook his head, shaking Bleu’s head vigorously.

“You try telling this to Damien, who’s bargaining in Tristain, let's see what he will do to you.”

Hearing this, Bleu's face turned even more green.

“.....L-let me off.....”

“So quickly go find out where Josette is staying!”

# Chapter 5: First meeting with Jack

In the end, Saito, who hadn't slept at all, began to search the hotels. Saito, together with Siesta, Guiche, Malicorne, and Tiffania separated into small groups and began their mission. They searched the hotels in town one by one.

Even though he had gone through three hotels, Saito still had not found out anything satisfactory.

"Have we finished searching this street?" Asked Siesta.

"Who knows?"

Saito walked into the fourth hotel. It was a large hotel by the name of "Our Sea". Behind the narrow counter, the hotel owner was smoking a pipe.

Saito asked the hotel owner the question that he had repeated for who knows how many times already.

"Can I ask you if.....there was a noble girl, about this tall, staying here? Her age may be seventeen, but she's smaller than she looks. She looks as cute as a human doll....."

After that, the owner, mumbled,"Unnnn", before shaking his head.

"She's not here too....."

Just when Saito was about to leave, he was sent flying by a man wearing a grey cape.

"Uwaa!"

The grey-caped guy, who just knocked down Saito, looked back to the counter.

"Hey! Old man! Is there a mage girl who lives here? She's seventeen, in a black-white dress, and looks doll-like!"

That voice made Saito turn back unconsciously.

The owner at the counter shook his head and said, "In this some kind of fashion trend for noble girls to go on a trip by themselves? The noble just now had also asked the same question, you know!"

The grey-caped man turned his body around. His gaze met Saito's. His face immediately took on a vicious sneer.

Saito simply gaped.

That guy.....isn't he the one that destroyed Derflinger and almost killed me nine days ago?!

"You....."

"Saito-san?"

"Siesta, run, run to the other guys. These were the people who targeted me before.

"Y-yes!" Siesta stiffly rushed away.

Saito laid his hand on the sword. The rage and pain of losing Derflinger swiftly growing in his mind, the runes on his left hand began to glow brightly in response to his emotions.

This guy.....

Even though he had clearly stabbed his sword through his stomach to the hilt, Bleu was still alive and kicking. Perhaps he was treated by that girl with Water magic. Along with Bleu's "Blade", those two guys are formidable opponents.

While taking note of his immediate surrounding, Saito lowered his center of gravity.

"Hey, I still have tons of things to ask."

However, Bleu shook his hand as if he can't stand the sight of Saito.

"Today's a rest day."

"Killers don't bloody rest."

The both of them, with their blades drawn, made the owner uneasy.

"Hey you two! Settle this outside!"

That voice made Saito raise his chin.

"Outside."

Just then, Bleu drew his wand and started chanting. "Airhammer."

A huge block of solidified air blew Saito away along with the front door of the hotel. He tumbled on to the main road.

"Dammit!" Saito quickly crawled up but Bleu had already fled like a rabbit down a hole.

"Hold it!" Saito yelled as he tried to chase after him.

Seeing Bleu running from the other side of the street, Jack winced.

"What did he do this time....."

"Big bro! Big bro! Not good!"

"What's not good? Let's hear it."

"That! That is, that guy's here!"

Hah? Jack opened his mouth wide. Not long after that, he saw the swordman charging at Bleu and widened his eyes.

' "What did you do this time?!"

"It's not my fault! It was a coincidence!"

Putting aside spell chanting, Jack reanalyzed the situation. Before the negotiations regarding their remuneration were completed, they can not kill this guy. If he was killed, then it was not a matter of money anymore, but rather a trap between the devil and the sea!

"Really! Always so troublesome!"

Jack chanted a short spell incantation. After which, the ground below Saito's feet began to bulge and turn into giant mud hands which grabbed Saito's feet.

However, Saito, whose left hand was holding the hilt of the sword, pulled it out in the blink of an eye and severed the hands.

Phiu~Jack gently whistled and started to chant another incantation. The earth on the ground rumbled and floated before turning into several golems.

The golems, clad in warrior attire, pounced on Saito with an inhuman speed, but Saito simply slashed the golems apart effortlessly while charging forward.

"Is that so? Tricks like this won't work, eh?" said Jack.

Jumping on a horse, Bleu asked Jack, "What do we do?"

"There's nothing to do. If we kill him, everything's lost. The only option left is escape." Jack said calmly.

Saito, who had been charging forward, noticed that the number of opponents had increased to two men.

However, no matter the number, it was all the same. These guys.....though I don't know who commissioned them to kill me, Derflinger was sacrificed because of them!

"Why didn't they kill him". "Why could they use such powerful spells". Such questions had already vanished from Saito's mind.

The strong feelings of hatred, along with the grief of losing Derflinger swirled around in his mind. The combat experience he had garnered, however, turned such emotions into a state of "calm".

Despite this.....just as his brain calmed down.....a strange feeling seeped into Saito's heart.

".....eh?"

His footsteps slowed down.

The feeling that seeped into Saito's heart.....was "fear".

That absurdly large "blade".

Also, that magical power that had managed to crush Derflinger.....

Before, he had fought against sheer strength.

Before, he had fought against sheer numbers.

However.....these guys, are "different".

Compared to the enemies he had fought in the past, they were different somehow.

"I can't win." The spark of fear in his heart whispered to him.

Saito tried to find reasons to crush his fear.

*What am I thinking?*

*No matter the enemy, I have always won anyway. Come on, Saito, look at the big guy. He's a mage but he looks so big.....haha, isn't that a boot!*

Even so, the fear didn't go down at all.

"Why isn't Derflinger here?"

*Damn!* (T/L: not sure if this a monologue here.)

"Why isn't Louise here?"

*I'm actually.....alone.*

"Think, Saito, think. Don't lose out to fear."

The big mage started to chant.

What is it now? An earth wall? Or using "Harden" from "Alchemy" to make his body as hard as stone?

"I'm going to cut you apart."

The sword that Saito was holding, was indeed a gift from the Founder Brimir, a real katana. Compared to the other swords and sabres, this was enhanced with "harden" and "permanence".

If it was held by the Gandalfr himself, there should be nothing he can't cut in Halkegenia.

However, even so, his fear didn't disappear.

His body still shook lightly.

"Dammit!"

When there was just a distance of fifteen meters between them, Saito leapt.

The earth wall in front of Jack that was just formed turned into shiny steel. Saito grabbed the sword with both hands and easily sliced through it.

Just like that, he carried on with the heavy swing and forcefully slammed the sword onto Jack's left hand.

However, Jack's expression did not change one bit. He simply held his hand that way for a while, blocking the sword, before lifting it.

"What the?"

Saito, shocked, was hurled to the ground. In a split second, Jack's fist came flying to Saito. Under the sun, Jack's fist seemed to radiate a glowing brilliance.

That's not a normal fist!

Saito rolled, dodging Jack's fist with barely a hairbreadth left.

Jack's fist, simply sank into the ground.

"Iya, you're quite light on your feet, eh?"

"Bam!". Jack withdrew his fist from the ground and it turned as hard as steel. Bleu had also used this technique before. The skill of hardening one's body seemed to be their forte.

However, his left hand was clearly slashed by the sword.....But not a drip of blood leaked out. What the hell happened?

Seeing Saito stand up, Jack smiled.

"You.....really have some great stuff there, eh? But then again, I can't fight you now."

Just as Saito prepared to dash forward, Jack started to chant. The ground bulged,

and broke down to tiny dust particles instantly. Although this was simply "Alchemy" the effect was completely different.

With Saito and company as the center, the corner of the street was completely hidden in the dust storm.

"Dammit!"

With his vision blocked, Saito had completely and effortlessly lost all his fighting capacity. This is the main street, if one swung his sword blindly in the dark, who knew what he'd cut.

After the dust subsided.....Jack and Bleu already disappeared. Saito, who looked like he just stepped out of a cloud, stamped his feet on the ground.

"Damn! Damn! Shit!" (T/L: original:)

Elbowing the gaping passers-bys, Guiche and company rushed to him.

"Saito! Are you okay?!"

"Are those people just now the guys who attacked you before?"

"It seems that they escaped."

Saito slid his sword back into the scabbard before slamming his fist into the ground.

"Don't be so resigned. There will be plenty of chances in the future." Guiche said, trying to console Saito. However, that just wasn't so.

What's regrettable wasn't that they escaped.

But.

The fact that he let them escape in front of his own eyes.

While he felt relieved that he hadn't battled them.

*Even with vengeance for Derflinger on the line.....I escaped.*

What kind of (shitty) hero am I? (T/L: translation of )

"Damn.....! Derflinger.....! My own strength, sure enough, just isn't enough to defeat them!"

From the window of the "White Whale of Land Inn", Jeanette, who had seen the entire episode, slowly showed a cold smile on her face. Isn't that guy, who just fought with her brothers, called de Onieres, the guy whose "job" was suspended?

Why would he run back to this street?

Pondering this, Jeanette smiled.

".....what was that racket about?"

Louise rubbed her eyes while sitting up from the bed. Jeanette told Louise, "Nothing much, it's just some drunkards."

".....Really troublesome. Didn't they wake everybody?"

Looking at the sleepy Louise, the smile on Jeanette grew more pronounced.

Looking back.....she would have never thought that this was the girl she had just passed before.

"Then, haven't your brothers come?"

"They came already~"

"Eh? Really?" Louise's eyes glowed.

Just then, the door just opened without much bother for a knock.

It's Jack and Bleu.

"Aiya. You're really late, brothers."

"This guy forgot the name of the inn." Jack poked Bleu's head.

"But, didn't I remember it!"

"You should have remembered it from the start!"

Not caring for his brother's rebuke, Bleu looked at Louise, his eyes widened.

"A girl!"

Jack frowned. "Did you control her heart and make another 'Puppet'?"

Louise looked at Jeanette, surprised.

"Puppet"?

What, are they talking about?

After that, Louise looked at the two men who just appeared. Covered in grey robes, they looked like monks.

However.....the aura they have is different. From their wands, they certainly are mages, but they didn't seem to be nobles.

"Hey, Big bro Jack."

"What?"

"Wasn't there once, when we sent one illegitimate noble child to a monastery?"

"Aah, that's about, two years ago."

"That place, do you still remember it?"

Jack took a glance at Louise, before returning his gaze to Jeanette. "Yeah, I do."

"That's great. Can you tell me about it?"

"What for?"

Jeanette smiled brilliantly. "This kid, says she wants to go there."

Bleu spread his hands, shocked. "Hey hey, Jeanette! What are you talking about? This information is something we got from a job, is it really so good if we reveal it that easily? Anyhow, that monastery is a place so secret that.....even only a

few Gallian royal nobles know about it....."

"That really doesn't matter at all."

"I'm just saying, don't you always nag me saying that we should preserve the confidentiality of our work?"

This conversation made Louise confused. These guys, what do they do for a living? Although it sounds that, they were secret Gallia spies.....

Maa, their identities weren't important.

A place for her to hide herself.....isn't that enough?

"Alright, I'll tell you."

"Big bro Jack!" Bleu yelled.

"If Big bro Damien knew about it, he would blow his top! Absolutely!"

"Maa, he should get angry. However, if I don't say it, Jeanette will get even more angry. Right, Jeanette?"

Jeanette's face slightly reddened before laughing happily.

"This kid.....it's like that from the start. When she sees someone she likes, she would help them no matter what. That's just great, miss." Jack said while looking at Louise. Louise, frightened by the pressuring aura emanated by Jack, fearfully nodded her head.

Jack took a parchment from his bad and wrote something smoothly.

"Go to the street along the coast of Gallia.....Graville, find a priest called Marthis in the Sandwellie monastery there. He should bring you to where you want to go." (T/L: not sure with the names.)

The letter, which was handed to Louise, was instead snatched by Jeanette.

"Hey, Jeanette....."

"I'll take her there. This kid, she can't cross the borders alone, right?"

"You.....what about the job? What are you planning to do!"

"In any case, the negotiations aren't completed, right? Big Bro Damien isn't here too. Also, even if I weren't here, there won't be much difference, will there?"

"Maa, it really is so."

Jeanette pounced on Jack and kissed his cheek. "Thank you, Big bro Jack! Although your face is scary, your heart is the softest!"

After that, Jeanette turned to the gaping Louise.

"Come on. Hurry up and prepare your stuff. We're going immediately. Hurry, hurry, we'll need at least three days to get to Gurabir from here, you know."

"Nn, okay....."

"Aah, right. Wear a large hood too, to cover your face, okay? We don't know who's gonna catch up to us, right?" Jeanette said to Louise, who was nodding furiously.

"Alright. Finally, let me ask you again."

"Eh?"

"From now on, the place I'm gonna bring you is a 'secret place'. Do you know what that means? In other words, once you go in, you're never getting out. Is that okay? You're never, ever going to see him again, you know?"

This sentence made Louise pale. It was as if someone had speared her head with an icicle. She was frozen from the depths of her soul.

"Never, ever going to see Saito again."

This matter was becoming reality in the blink of an eye, made it that much heavier a burden.....

However.....she had realized what she had to do and that was why she ran away, wasn't it?

Because, Saito is already.....in love with a person who loves him and can protect

him more.

She once thought that being at Saito's side was the only place for her. However, now she cannot return to that place.

If she didn't do this.....meeting with him would only make her heart ache more. It could be said that she didn't want to be hurt anymore. The pain was unbearably excruciating.

The Louise of the past had already died. Now there is just a shell.....

*"Never mind." Louise said. The smile on Jeanette's face resurfaced.*

"Sacrificing yourself for 'love'? Good, I like this kind the best."

# Chapter 6: Damien and Gondrin

Eleonore sat in her chair in the Research Room, her left hand going back and forth, grasping the papers on the table.

She rubbed her temple with her right finger, a habit that happened every time she met something bad, she would shut her eyes, shape her lips into a pout (like this: ), and rub her temple vigorously.

Her expression now was the spitting image of her younger sister.

"However, that kid.....still hasn't come back?"

After hearing about Louise's disappearance, Eleonore simply thought, "It really is just a child's play."

After living together for some time, their true selves, along with all their faults, would reveal themselves. She initially thought Louise was just sulking, and that she would return home quickly, right? However, things went contrary to her wishes, and there hadn't been any news about Louise yet.

Eleonore had started to get a little worried, and had decided to personally visit Des Onieres to get the details from Saito.

"Now is not the time for that."

She casually took the document that she had just ravaged. It was sent this morning.

"The heck?.....this time I got hit?"

On the paper was her appointed research topic, which was also quite a peculiar topic.

"'A magical item that could release Alchemy for a substantial period of time' ? What the heck are those people trying to do to *me*, the one in charge of the Founder's sculpture?"

There must be something behind all this.....with that in mind, Eleonore stood up. Picking up her cape, which had been hung on the wall, she draped it over her slim figure, she put on her hat, which was the on the corner of the table, on her head and a majestic Academy researcher was then born.

"Seriously.....those guys on top there, I can't stand them anymore....."

While mumbling, Eleonore exited the research office, and locked the door offhandedly.

"Academy", refers to a magic tower of thirty levels. In the outer ring of the towers, a long corridor linked all the rooms.

In the center of the tower, there was a "lifting device", powered by wind stones, to travel between the levels. It looked very similar to the "elevators" of Saito's world, pulling a lever in front on the entrance of the lifting device, a cage will drop in front of them.

Walking into it and then saying her destination, "Top floor", the cage began to rise with the glow of the eyes of the in-cage statue.

Reaching the top, the first thing to enter her sight was a steel door decorated with an pentagram. Sensing the visitor, the eyes of the statue on either side of the door glowed and turned their gaze to Eleonore.

After a brief confirmation of her identity, the door opened.

"....."

No matter how many times she had come here, this place still exuded a powerful pressure. Behind the door was the entrance room to the Academy Head Office.....the place where the masterminds behind the administration of Tristain went about their business.

There was a door on either side of the entrance room. Behind the table in the dead center of the entrance room, a woman who had been writing official

documents lifted her head after noticing Eleonore's presence.

"Ah, if isn't that Miss Valliere. May I ask what brings you here?

She was the secretary of the Academy President, Miss Valentine. A woman of extreme rationalism and an ice-cold heart. Even though she was about Eleonore's age, they were not really friendly with each other. In other words, she was a troublesome woman.

"I want to meet Gondrin."

Miss Valentine straightened her figure and asked Eleonore, "Did you make an appointment beforehand?"

"No, I didn't."

Hearing this, Miss Valentine showed a difficult face.

"Then, I'm sorry that I cannot arrange for such an unexpected meeting. This is protocol."

Upon hearing this, a few angry veins emerged on Eleonore's forehead. Her brow quivering with agitation, Eleonore stepped maliciously towards the secretary.

"Don't take me as some palace official or some schoolgirl from the country side. Can you send word that the Head Academy Researcher, Miss Eleonore de Valliere is requesting for a meeting?"

"I'm, of course, very clear with this, but even if it were Her Majesty herself to come, my reply would remain the same. 'This is protocol.'"

The angry veins on Eleonore's brow increased exponentially. She moved her face dangerously close to Miss Valentine's and said with a voice, trembling with anger, "You're really thick-headed."

"Until now, the number of academy researchers who tried to force an entry through here is one, and that's you, Miss Eleonore. How about you learn a little manners from others. If you had done that, perhaps you would have been much more successful with your marriage....."

Laughing coldly, Miss Valentine said the taboo word.

Eleonore chuckled coldly while whipping out her wand, pointing it to Miss Valentine's nose. At the same time, Valentine's wand was also whipped out, pointing at Eleonore's nose.

"Anyone in the academy who attacks with magic will be excommunicated.....you should know that very well."

"Nobody will use attack magic. I just want to use magic to close that annoying mouth of yours for a while."

In this tense atmosphere, a sharp voice from the crystal transmitter on the table suddenly pierced the air.

"Hey hey, you two, stop it!"

Facing the transmitter, Eleonore yelled, "Gondrin! I'm just giving your secretary a little lesson on social etiquette."

"Yeah, yeah.....seriously. Come in then."

Just then, the door on the left opened. Before leaving, Eleonore shot a vicious glare at Valentine.

The room was filled with a myriad of magical items and luxurious decorations. In the dead center of the room that looked like a tumbled toy box stood a gaunt old gentleman.

He had a silver crown and a meticulously trimmed mustache under his nose. Even though he looked neat, it was hard to sense a powerful aura around him. This had also caused him to be easily forgotten and underestimated.

And such a man was the president of the "Academy", Mr Gondrin.

"Seriously.....what is it this time, Miss Valiere?"

Gondrin, who stuttered and mumbled, watched Eleonore slowly stepped closer to him.

"It's not simply a matter of 'what's it this time'!" Eleonore yelled straight to his face. Gondrin, who already had a weak aura about him, withered.

"Don't yell that loud..... this old man is a bag of old bones you know....."

"Of course I'm yelling! Please give me an reasonable explanation for this research command." Eleonore thrust out the document.

"Aah.....about that. Nn, actually, it's regarding a repeated request from a VIP from the palace....."

"Even though I don't think this is heretical, it doesn't follow the traditional research topics of the 'Academy'".

"What you're saying isn't wrong, but an old man like also has his stand on this subject....."

While wiping away the sweat on his brow, Gondrin took a glance at Eleonore.

"What are those palace guys thinking? Not long ago, Bailey was also commanded to do some strange research....."

"Meh, meh.....This old man doesn't know anything....."

Straightening her shoulders, Eleonore squinted angrily at Gondrin.

"Are you hiding something?"

"This old man?! Hiding something from you?! Impossible! This old man has nothing to hide!" Gondrin nervously waved his hands.

"Really?"

"O-of course! Nn, about that, even though I'm not sure what assignment the palace government gave you, they should have their own concerns. Helping them out now is not a bad idea. Miss Valliere, this old man remembers that you once placed an order for a high speed magic cauldron, right?"

"Uh huh....."

That was the Achilles's heel of her research. No matter the topic of research,

money is always needed. Even with the academic investment of Tristain, the budget allocation here is still quite limited.

"I'll just increase the priority for the research budget of the 'Earth' department, how about that? I'll try my best to convince the board."

Eleonore's brow furrowed again. Even though she was very conflicted, in the end, she still replied with a hesitating voice, "B-but, to start such a unconvincing topic....."

"What are you talking about? You're not a student anymore. Research requires creativity, right? We at the 'Academy' are no different."

"....."

Gondrin rested his hand on Eleonore's shoulders. "As long as I can help impressive researchers like you work in a more comfortable and complete environment, it's nothing for this old man to work a little harder."

".....Two more M-Mandragora fields will do fine." (T/L: Mandragora is the scientific name for "mandrake", which is a herb)

"That's that then."

Certain of her victory, Eleonore happily skipped out of Gondrin's room.

After closing the door, Gondrin heaved a sigh and plopped back to his chair. A small shadow quickly hopped out from the curtains.

It was just a ten year old boy.

With a head of blond hair and a face with a mischievous expression, he looked out of place with the room. The youngster said happily, "Smoothly done, Gray-sama."

"That Eleonore de Valliere is certainly a tough nut to crack.....even though her skills are extremely proficient."

Gondrin then turned towards the youngster and spoke with a very troubled tone, "Then you must have heard it. Even with your orders, we require a huge amount

of monetary investment. Two hundred thousand ecus is impossible. One hundred thousand ecus at most. That's the best we can do."

"Is there no other way to get more investors?"

"Maintaining a tradition also requires money.....if we took any more money, then the administration body of the country itself would be in trouble."

"Maintaining tradition is just wishful thinking on the part of Tristian nobles, right?"

Gondrin leaned back on the chair. "Yup. However, we have satisfied all the willful requests you've made from us, so how about we be the ones to make the willful request this time,eh?"

Damien thought about it for a long time.

"One hundred and eighty thousand ecus. Not one less."

"One hundred and twenty thousand ecus.

"Don't be that inconsiderate." Damien shook his head. It was quite unimaginable that such words will come out of a ten year old boy's mouth.

"Can't reach an agreement, eh? I just can't get it through my head; what do you need that much money for?" Gondrin asked.

"We have a dream."

"A dream?"

"Yes, a dream."

At this moment Damien's face started to show the angelic smile of a ten year old.

Eleonore, who had returned to her research room, threw herself down on the table.

"Why am I always the one to give in.....the person I am....."

The recent "Academy" is getting stranger. Bizarre research topics one after

another.....Commands from the palace? Who will it be? Or, is it really so?

Even so, how does someone like me who's working their heart out in the Academy understand the inside story of these matters?

Right. Eleonore suddenly thought of something.

How about she try asking Louise about it?

"Ah."

Remembering that Louise just ran away from the house, Eleonore's shoulders drooped again.

"That kid, where and what is she doing.....?"

# Chapter 7: Soeur Vanessa

Five days passed in the blink of an eye.

Louise finally reached Gurabir after a three day journey from Sulpice. A quiet coast fishing village, Gurabir was complete with rustic charm. Sanbailey Monastery was built on a small hill just beside the port.

Even though Father Marthis looked shocked to meet Jeanette and Louise, he changed his expression after reading the letter from Jack.

"Wh-what the.....No, but....."

However, amidst all the troubles, Father Marthis still arranged everything necessary. After preparing the dragon cage, he started to preach to Louise, who was still at odds at her decision.

All the women you're going to meet there also have their own unspeakable reasons to live there.

Don't dig too deep.

Also.....

Louise lowered her head and looked at the holy cross(T/L:) on her neck. It was a normal looking cross that could be found anywhere but now.....something incredible happened. Louise's face and hair colour started to shift.

It seems that it is embedded with a powerful "Face Change" magic.

"Never forget this....." Father Marthis' tone turned serious before telling her never to tell anyone her real name. Seems like the place she's going to live is a place filled with unspeakable secrets. Meh, if it wasn't so it wouldn't do any good to hide there, would it?

Stepping into the dragon cage, Louise thanked Jeanette profusely. She had been in her debt from the start.

"Good bye. Thank you so much."

Even though she said that, Jeanette still shook her head.

"Goodbye. Even though I've got a feeling we'll meet again."

"Isn't it said that it's forbidden to go out again?" Louise asked.

"Yeah, I know, but I've just got that feeling." Jeanette replied, her tone hovering between serious and joking.

After going through so much, Louise really felt that Saint Margerita's was suited for her.

"The sea breeze feels so good....." Louise sighed as she gazed at the silvery waves of the "outer sea". She had been here for two days already.

"I can't believe there's actually such an amazing place in Halkegenia."

"This is really the "Lone Island of the Mainland"(T/L:).

The church, which stood erected on the steep cliff of the peninsula, is completely isolated from the mainland save for a narrow spit of sharp rocks. The treacherous sea cliff forced ships to stay away. If somebody were to come here, they would have to fly here like her. In other words, nobody can come here.....

This is really a suitable place for hiding. The winding blowing into her pores, the hair that tickled her face was silky black. Even though she had seen this in the mirror, her deep amber eyes changed to black, her nose the same as all the others.

This was all thanks to the magically enhanced cross. Even her own family couldn't recognize her as Louise now.

It was as if she completely changed her person. She felt that she had gained enlightenment. Until she has completely forgotten how she looked like.....only then she could forget about the deep pain in her heart.

"Soeur Vanessa."(T/L:·)

Louise turned to the call. She had continued to use the fake name given to her by Jeanette. Here, Louise is called "Sister Vanessa". Apart from that, no other identification is required.

"Yes." Saying that, Louise turned seeing the abbess looking intently at her. She was a kind woman of near forty years of age. Spying around, after confirming that they were alone, the abbess moved closer to Louise and said softly, "Then, please allow me to remind you again.....since you've come here, please forget everything. I won't ask you how you know of this place..... so don't go nosing around for the past of the other sisters."

"Of course. I'm here to forget." Louise said.

When Louise arrived, the abbess did not ask about her past. In other words, she didn't want to know anything extra.

"Also, about the cross on your neck.....according to the rules here, you must never take it off. I'm sure you understand why. However, the girls who had been staying here since birth know nothing about the secret of the cross. Thus, the secret about the magic on the cross must never reach anyone else's ears."

Louise nodded.

"Very well. Then I have nothing else to say. Let us serve the Founder here quietly. Until our bodies turn to dust....."

Leaving her words like that, the abbess left. Louise surveyed the place she was going to live in from today, Saint Margarita's Monastery. The delicate monastery and the dormitories built on the narrow peninsula. In between the wavy outline of the rocks, there was a reservoir and a few farms.

These were packed into a land about the size of the academy. There were about thirty women living here. Every week, a relief ship would descend from the skies and deliver daily supplies and foodstuff.....

"Living in holy prayers every day."

Twelve days before, she was still living leisurely in Des Onieres, but today she

was looking out to the sea in the church at the end of the world.

Fate is really such a strange thing.....

Just as she was walking while thinking deeply.....

"Miss Vanessa! Miss Vanessa!"

Three young sisters run to her from in front. Louise was surrounded by the three girls in an instant, while they started to make a ruckus.

"Where did Miss Vanessa come from?"

"Hey, that's my line!"

"What were you doing before this?"

The three completely ignored everything that the abbess just said to her. While Louise was toiling with a hurricane of her own in her head, the young sisters continued their barrage of questions.

"Hey!"

A sister angrily yelled from behind.

"Miss Vanessa!"

A girl with long silver hair walked straight to her. The girl, called Josette, placed her hands on her waist, her face serious.

"You guys really.....Didn't the abbess always tell us 'not to be interested in earthly things'?"

Just after she finished, a secretive smile surfaced on the faces of the girls.

"Ala. You don't seem to have the reason to say such things to Miss Vanessa. You're the one who's so interested in earthly things."

"What are you talking about. What do you mean, huh?"

"Oh, nothing. Because.....na....."

The girls ran away bickering under Josette's fierce glare.

Facing Louise, who was at a lost of words, Josette hastily apologized.

"Sorry, they aren't bad children. It's just that, well, you know, living in a place like this for so long.....makes one so bored."

"Yeah."

Louise accepted the apology. She slowly realized that there were two kinds of women in the monastery. Women who, like her, came here to forget about everything.....

The middle-aged women were like that. They created an untouchable aura around them, only praying everyday.

On the other hand was the younger sisters. Maybe.....they came here since young. Being unable to expose themselves publicly, bastard children of nobles.....it should be like so. Now that she thought of it, she heard cries of babies in the other room when she had her breakfast.

They don't even know why they lived here since they were young. Thus, they were as lively like the young girls that she has just met.

Just as Louise was once again immersed into her thoughts, Josette stretched out her hand. "I'm Josette. I'm in your care."

".....I'm called Va-vanessa. I'm also in your care, Sister Josette.

"Just call me Josette. This way no one has to bother with the troublesome formalities." Josette smiled.

In the next few days, for unknown reasons, Josette followed Louise around like a puppy dog.

In the monastery, every day, during morning and evening when they took their meals at the fixed time, Josette always sat beside Louise like she was up to something.

Not only that.

Josette also became the caretaker of Louise, who had just arrived. Their beds were even linked together.

Even Louise began to feel irritated. Thinking that she could finally get some peace of mind here, why would that girl be so clingy?

On that night of becoming Louise's roommate, Josette chatted with Louise about nothing and everything in particular.

"Na, Vanessa. I didn't snoop around your past, right? Because that's the rules! But, if it was just about something about the 'outside', there shouldn't be a problem, right?"

"......Outside?"

"Yeah. Na, what do the young girls outside wear?"

"Ask the others about this kind of stuff."

Louise's cold answer did not crush Josette's enthusiasm.

"Then, have you ever dated a boy? You wouldn't mind telling me these things, right?

A familiar's shadow surfaced in Louise's mind. She came here just to forget him! Louise, who unknowingly started to get angry, began to speak in a sharp tone, "......mind what you say! I'm very troubled!"

"What? You don't have to be so angry about that." Saying that, Josette started to slip into her bed.

Next..... every time she reached her "sanctuary", as she started to feel comforted.....

Her vision was filled with Saito.

Even though she abandoned everything and come to this hidden place.....

If she lived here, she'll never meet Saito.

Thinking back, she has always slept with Saito. If she didn't do so, she couldn't

sleep at all. Even though she could have used wine to bring her into dreamland at Sulpice, there's nothing of sorts here. If she had thought of Saito when she was awake.....her chest felt as pain as if someone pierced her with sword.

Being unable to link her heart with her familiar.....she never thought that it would be so excruciating. She had always thought that even if he strayed a little sometimes, looking at other girls, the one that he really kept in his heart was her.

However.....looking at Saito's expression, she didn't think so anymore.

"The girl that Saito likes.....isn't me, but the princess. A girl called Henrietta de Tristian....."

"The most amazing woman in the whole country. A queen above all nobles, the powerful woman....."

Compared to her, she was nothing. Thinking like this made her aware of how small her existence was.

Little Louise. Louise the Zero. A girl with a thin body and bad temper.....

".....wu. Er.....wuwu" After she noticed that, Louise leaked out a sob. She hid her crying sounds with the blanket. She can't let the girls she was going to live with from today see her cry like this.

However, Josette who had been sleeping beside her seemed to have heard it. She got up and crawled into Louise's blanket sneakily.

"What happened?"

"N-nothing.....so.....wu"

"Sorry, did I say anything I shouldn't have?"

Her caring voice made Louise's emotions surge.

"R-really.....it's nothing.....wu"

Just then, Josette silently hugged Louise's head.

"Never mind. Just cry it all out."

"I don't want to....."

"Why?"

"I-it'll be embarrassing.....wuwu.....it'll make me look like a coward. Wuwu."

"There's nothing bad about being a coward anyway. I'm also one."

Josette just kept caressing Louise's head.

The next morning.....Louise opened her red-rimmed eyes and got up from the bed unwillingly. The sound of Josette's soft breathing could be heard beside her.

Seeing her like that, she still had the face of a child. However, her face was also changed by the cross on her neck, right.....

"This child.....should've been sent here since birth."

That's why she was so curious about the outside world.

Except for the daily activities here, she knew nothing else. Maybe she never even met girls of her age. Louise stared at her. Louise once thought that she was the unluckiest girl in the entire world.

However, Josette and the other girls, who have been living here since birth, didn't even know about their misfortune. She was comforted by such a child.

She then noticed how willful, unthoughtful of her to cry yesterday.

What's so bad about talking about the outside world?

Josette slowly got up.

"Fuaaah.....Good morning. Sorry, I fell asleep on your bed."

Louise shook her head.

"Never mind. About yesterday, sorry about that. If you're still willing, I can tell you something about the outside world. I'm bored anyway."

Hearing this, Josette's eyes started to glow.

"Really?"

Louise nodded hard.

Life in Saint Margarita's Monastery is bound by a strict timetable. After getting up in the morning, the sisters have to pray in the hall. They had their breakfast after daily cleaning. Farming work and other miscellaneous things would continue until three in the afternoon.

Then it was a period of leisure until the evening, when they'd have their dinner.

Following a prayer after dinner, they will go to sleep. It could be said their lives start at dawn and end at dusk. This simple lifestyle was inconceivable to Louise, who had been spoilt by a rich noble lifestyle from birth.

Thus, Louise used her sparse leisure time to tell stories about the outside world to Josette and the girls. Every sister's eyes was sparkling radiantly, it was as if Louise was a heroine from ancient myths.

As usual, the girls gathered on Louise's bed, enchanted by Louise's stories. Four girls wrapped in blankets chatted surreptitiously. They'd have to do that to prevent their excited voices from leaking out.

There wasn't even a candle around. It was pitch black.

"Yup. We 'll go out during days of rest."

"Go out?"

"Yeah. Going around in horse-drawn carriages, to faraway places. It's quite fun."

"Nana, what's a horse?"

Josette, who took lead among the girls didn't even know what was a horse. Come to think of it, there wasn't a horse anywhere in the small monastery.

"How do I put it.....an animal for riding?"

"Bigger than a dragon?"

"Of course the dragon's bigger."

"I know what a dog is! I saw one on a ship once."

"A horse, can it.....fly?"

"There's some animals that're similar to the dog and can fly, like the Pegasus' and the griffon....."

"What's that! What kind of animal is that?"

Her daily life, food, the streets.....things like these were the things that made them excited the most. However, Louise noticed something strange while they were chatting.

Even though they were a bunch of girls who don't know what is a horse, they were unimaginably well aware of the fashion trend between city girls.....like shops that sell fabrics and clothes.

Even though they don't even know anything about the street formations in the capital of Gallia, Lutèce, they knew the extreme details of every corner of the streets. This made Louise feel very amazed.

"You do know a whole lot about it. The hats with a wavy rim is really quite

popular."

After being praised like that, a girl started to get conceited and said, "The High Priest who comes here sometimes also tells us something about the fashion trends in the outside streets."

There also seem to be visitors in a secretive monastery like this. Thus, for them, except for something like hearing about the outside world, there shouldn't be other forms of entertainment.

"But the High Priest seems to tell Josette more things, you know!" After a girl said so, Josette was so embarrassed that her neck even turned red too.

"What are you all talking about! I hope that you won't say such strange things!" (T/L:exceptionally polite girl, this one.)

"Ah? Isn't it so?" The girls sneered.

"Look, Miss Josette turned completely red! As red as an apple!"

"Please get a hold of yourselves! You're really rude!" Josette protested loudly, her face bright red. It seemed that Josette had some connection with the High Priest. Louise started to feel a little jealous of Josette.

"So that's why you want to know more about the outside world!"

"No, that's not it!" Josette firmly denied. Louise unconsciously overlapped her shadow with hers. Aah, she has also been teased once, and had once denied just as firmly too.

Sweet memories and an excruciating pain swirling around her heart, Louise sighed. The other girls didn't notice the change in Louise's expression and continued asking their questions.

"Then, Miss Vanessa, have you ever kissed before?"

Because of this casual question, Louise's heart broke cleanly into half. Memories surged into her mind like a tsunami in a sudden, straining her already weak heart.

Louise rolled her eyes and fell. No matter how Josette shook her, she didn't wake up. It seemed that she had fainted.

".....damn. Is a kiss between lovers something that intense?"

Hearing this, Louise revived with a "ha!".

"Are you okay? Vanessa."

"I-it's alright." Louise mumbled as she shook her head. "Cough cough." Dry coughs were heard from the other beds. It seems that they were too noisy.

The girls silently left Louise's bed and returned to their own.

Silence returned.....Louise closed her eyes.

"Have I kissed before?"

The question just now resurfaced in her mind.

She did, and did so many times.

Thinking so, she noticed that Saito and her had met each other because of a kiss, and left each other because of a kiss. The happiest things in her life, and the saddest things in her life were connected to memories of kisses.

The two kinds of kiss mixed around. Louise didn't know if she started to feel sad, depressed or tired. Louise traced the outline of her lips slowly with her fingers.....countless memories of the past resurfaced.

"Will I meet Saito in a dream again today?" Louise spaced out, thinking about this. She hugged her knees and curled into a ball under blanket.

After that happened, Louise always met Saito in her dreams every night.

She came to this lonely island after clearly making the resolution to leave him.....Didn't this meant that all of that meant nothing? Louise started to become upset. She wanted to forget everything.....but she hadn't been able to do so.

The Saito in her dreams, had always hugged Louise so very gently. Muttering sweet nothings, oaths of love in her ear.....but once she started to focus on Saito,

he would disappear; while the her in the dreams would attempt to find Saito aimlessly. Sometimes she would search in the academy, sometimes in Tristannia, once she even went to her old home in La Valliere to find him. However, a common thing that happened no matter where she tried to find him.....

No matter where, she couldn't find Saito.

Thus, a dark atmosphere started to surround Louise. Even the curious girls in the beginning became less inclined to get close to her.

However, even so, only Josette still chatted with Lousie like normal.

"Ah, Miss Vanessa, I have something else to ask....." One day, after their relationship became closer, Josette asked Louise embarrassedly.

"What?"

"About my hair.....then, what kind of hairstyle would suit me the most?"

"Won't just any hairstyle do?"

Josette was a little angry at Louise's coldness.

"What's so bad about asking you about this?"

"......so this is love." Hearing Louise say this tiredly, Josette shook her exaggeratedly.

"No! Really!"

"I saw through it a long time ago. Hey, maybe it's the high priest who comes here sometimes? However I still have to advise you to give up, this thing about love....."

"Why?"

"Because it's fated, that you'll get betrayed one day."

Hearing Louise say this, Josette raised her hands, shocked.

"Seriously, why are all of you 'saints' the same?"

Suddenly being called as a saint, Louise turned nervous. She was once called "Aquileia's Saint" herself. Why would Josette know about this? Louise became nervous.

"S-saint.....? What do you mean?"

"Aah, that, that's a name for people like you who entered this place midway. Always showing a dark face, you all seem like you're carrying the burden of the entire world on your shoulders. I really do hope that you can be more considerate of the other people here."

It seemed that the name "saint" is more of a sarcastic metaphor. Louise only got angry to this.

"In the outside world, there're so many things that you don't even know. No matter if it's happy things, or sad things. There are even things that will hurt you so severely that you want to die!" Louise could not control herself.

"Yeah. Yeah, maybe it is so. Like what you say, I know nothing at all. Really, except for the life here, I don't know anything else." Josette replied with a expressionless face.

"....."

"However, this doesn't mean that we don't understand what's happiness or sadness. Maybe my world is small, but even in this small world, many things happen.....of course, it isn't love. We cannot fall in love, nor are we in love. Simply because, we're people of cloth. Such things will never be forgiven. But....."

Saying this, Josette place her hands on her chest.

"That person, praised my hair. This colour.....because it's almost white, I once hated it so much, but he actually said this hair colour is beautiful." Josette smiled sweetly.

"Here, even if there is no pretty clothes.....but at least when he comes, I still want to tie my hair up into a more suitable hairstyle. If I just did that, even the Founder will just leave me aside, don't you think so?

Hearing this, Louise felt embarrassed. It was because, she was jealous.

"I did once." Louise answered, her voice trembling.

"Eh?"

"Kissing."

Josette laughed.

"That's like a dream to me, something like kissing a lover."

Louise slightly tilted Josette's head scarf.

"Even though I don't really care about dressing up and the like, but I think your hair is cute. Nn, how about you separate them from the middle?"

Josette followed Louise advice and separated her hair from the middle with her finger.

"How is it?"

Louise stared for a while.....

"It's not so good. The original style was better."

Josette laughed. Louise, influenced, also began to laugh.

That night, Louise and Josette secretly crept out from the dorms. Actually they didn't have anything important to discuss, but just found themselves staring at each other as they could not fall asleep.

As they walked side by side, Louise noticed that Josette was shorter than her by ten Saitongs.(T/L: unit of length, I think, original:)

Her side profile was also quite child-like.....

Walking out of the dorms, two girls walked to the edge of the cliff. The twin moons hovered above the sea, radiating their brilliance. The moonlight scattered onto the ocean surface, turning into thousands of silver scales.

"It's so annoying."

"What's so annoying?"

"Things that are so foolishly beautiful."

"Why do you think it's annoying?"

"Everytime I see something beautiful, memories often pop out of nowhere.."

"Are they sad memories?"

"Nn." Louise nodded.

"Because happy memories often happen in beautiful places. Like the scenery that we once gazed at from afar, like the bright moon that we once admired together....."

"With a lover?"

"Nn."

"Fell out?"

"Maybe."

Josette shook her head.

"If you're sad because you fell out of love, I can understand. But, such good memories, why would you get upset over it? If so, those memories aren't memories at all."

"That's because all these memories have become lies. Just because something bad happened, all these precious memories, turned into lies." Gazing at the sea, Louise said. Crystal tears rolled down her cheeks.

"And that's why you came here?"

"Yes."

Hearing that, Josette caressed Louise's cheeks with her hands before staring

straight into Louise's eyes.

"W-what are you doing?"

"Me, I don't think there's things like that. "Everything becoming lies" and such. Even though I don't really understand, but I think the things that make you feel that 'it's beautiful' are still very beautiful."

"What do you mean?"

"Happy things. Exciting things. These are surely good things. I think you can't see beyond the lies and that's why you lost your confidence."

Louise bit her lip.

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because I'm like that. I sometimes think that that guy doesn't like me at all. He's comes to visit me just out of pity. Even though he once said that "I came to see you." ..... I still doubt him sometimes. During those times, I'll get all depressed. Every time I see my silver hair in the mirror.....seeing my small body, hearing those bad stuff that my friends say, at those times, I can't stop myself from doubting myself."

Josette stopped for a while. She smiled softly.

"But, even though that guy is just pitying me.....I won't give up. Even though it's like that, even if him praising my hair, saying that "I came to see you" was a lie.....my feelings that time, were true. With this, I, can continue to live. Unlike you, who chose to escape."

Louise felt as if Josette's words gave her hard head a good hammering.

Seeing as Louise stayed silent, Josette's cheek started to redden with embarrassment.

"Sorry, I was speaking so willfully."

"Wu wu....." Louise shook her head. "What you said was right. I just chose to escape. Yes, what you said was right. Even though I had determined that I'd

believe him no matter what he does.....but I didn't even give him a chance to explain."

If she heard the explanation, maybe she would be even more shocked, or maybe she would be hurt more deeply. Even so.....she didn't even face the truth and simply ran away.

Louise sneaked into her blanket after returning to the dorm with Josette, but she still couldn't sleep. She heard Josette's steady breathing beside her.....why did her emotions become that way?.....Louise got up again, and took out the Founder's Prayer Book from the private drawer.

She also took out the Water Ruby. Her wand and the Water Ruby. In the end, she still couldn't let go of these two things.

That day, they seemed to have become her shadows, staring at them made her feel as if something was going to happen. Louise opened the Founder's Prayer Book under the blanket.

"....."

Why would it be now, Louise started to ponder.

The pages started to glow slightly, words formed on what was just plain white paper seconds before.

[If the four successors and their familiars have a problem, the successors of "Void" cannot give up. The power of "Void" can only awaken in the blood of the successors. The successors of "Void" , must find the other successors. And then, take back the "Holy land" from the heretics.]

Words will form in times of need, Derflinger once said that. Now when there is the shortage of one Void user, shouldn't the Founder's Prayer Book tell something to the successors of the Void.

"Then.....even if the successors of the Void dies, there will be others to inherit this power?"

Louise mumbled as she bit her lip.

If so.....what we hope would be lost. If this thing were to be known by Romalia.....

"The Holy Crusade will continue."

Louise grasped her fists hard under the blanket.

She must tell this to Saito and the Princess.....they felt safe because they had crushed Romalia's wild ambitions.

However, how is she going to tell them?

She was on this lone island away from the mainland.....there wasn't a way to leave this place.

"However,".....Louise nodded in her heart.

She can't determine if Romalia knows about this. If she just kept it a secret from everybody, then she wouldn't be afraid that this would be leaked out. As long as she just slept forever in this jail-like convent with the Founder's prayer book, she may be able to keep this secret to herself.

"Nn." Louise nodded in her heart again.

But that was just an excuse.

I'm just.....thinking that "this doesn't matter to me." I just don't want to see Saito and the princess, just don't want to get even more hurt.....

"I don't want to know."

Louise nodded. Why did she get chosen? If she wasn't the successor of the Void, she wouldn't have these troubles. Something like the future of Halkegenia, is a terribly heavy burden on her shoulders.

Just then.....on the next page, words formed.

Ancient runes.

This, is the new Void spell.

"....."

What did God and the Founder, want her to use the "Void" for?

The runes that have emerged, seemed to be scolding her. "You there, such great power has been given to you, but you don't want to do anything with it and wither here forever?!"

She seemed to have been scolded by the Founder's prayer book.

.....ah, this. So it's like this.

So she actually escaped from her own decision to "believe in Saito no matter happens", and also from the destiny that has been bestowed to her.

Louise felt herself being swallowed by a great feeling of restlessness.

# Chapter 8: Josette's Resolution

Even though Josette said something like that to Louise yesterday, she was not really confident in herself....."From now on, I'll only come for you", if he really was just joking then.....she would also have thoughts of running away from here.

However, Josette did not want to give in to her fears. To her, the high priest from Romalia, Julio, is everything to her.

Before meeting Julio, Josette has always thought that she would staying in this Saint Margarita Convent forever,bored for the rest of her life.

However after his arrival, the dying embers of her gloomy life started to revive again.....even though the time spent with Julio is short.....but every second is filled with precious memories.

That's why she cared so much about what Louise said.

How can memories, as precious as jewels, be lies? Even though she didn't know what had happened to her before, but more importantly, her feelings and memories, will never be fake.

Josette glanced at Louise, who was biting a large bread, at the corner of her eye. She looked like she had something on her mind.

She gave the feeling that her heart was elsewhere.

Is she still thinking about yesterday? Even though this thought flashed through her mind, it was quickly stamped out of existence.

Compare to these, when was Dragon-kun (T/L:) coming here again?

Three weeks passed since their last meeting.

Josette sighed deeply.

"Those jewel-like memories really makes other times become as boring as stones."

She unconsciously remembered their last meeting when he brought that ring. The brilliant amber gem embedded in the delicate ring.....

"It would be my pleasure if you can wear it."

Julio's words echoed around her ears. After seeing that the ring fit snugly into Josette's finger, Julio nodded contently, before returning to telling stories about the city streets again.

Even though he never repeated those words again.....but that sentence still left a deep mark on Josette's heart. If that ring is really mine.....what would Julio do to me?

Will he give me the title of head priestess?

Or, would he give me.....something amazing?

Just because she was still immersed in these fantasies, the sudden sound of flapping wings made Josette agitated. If it was some other time, she would have just put on a sour face, suppressing her deep passion and excitement while waiting, but she just could not stand it this time.

Not caring about her breakfast that was barely eaten, Josette rushed out from the canteen.

When the blue-scaled sky dragon came into view, Josette felt like crying. From the back of the sky dragon, Julio, wearing a white cape, jumped down.

Without a moment's hesitation, Josette flew into his embrace.

"Onee san."

"Oi, oi, this shouldn't what a sister should do! And I thought this time I'm also going to look at someone's sour face, listening to her complain about something."

Hearing this, Josette quickly let go of Julio.

"I-I was going to do so, but, this time I didn't suppress it."

She then lifted her head up, watching Julio with eyes shaking full of hope.

"Can you stay a bit longer today?"

Seeing Julio shake his head in regret, Josette's face darken with worry.

"What happened?"

"No.....nothing. I just thought of a conversation with a new girl last night. I knew it, Oni san only comes here just out of pity."

Julio laughed after hearing that.

"Even if it was like that, what's so bad about it?"

"Nothing much. I just felt that I was too stupid."

Josette's heart seemed like it would just break apart at any moment. Even though she had repeated to herself that this feeling is not love for uncountable times already, but when that time really comes, she just couldn't face it.

"I really am in no position to tease Vanessa." Josette shook her head.

"Alright alright, since the great Lord Carindal Deacon (T/L:) is so busy with his work, then please quickly finish your business here and go the side of other disciples."

Hearing words full of sarcasm, Julio stll smiled.

"Okay, then I'll just say it straight. Josette, I'm here to take you away."

"What?"

Julio's sudden speech made Josette dumbstruck.

"As there were too much red tape, I'm so sorry for taking so long."

Compared to shock, Josette felt more agitated (T/L:, the word "angry" doesn't fit here). Travelling the outside world with Julio seemed like a enticing proposal.

This was also Josette's wish. However, Josette also knew that it was ridiculous. She was unable to leave this place, she cannot leave this place, she had been told such things all along.....

"Onee san's joke is really lame, if you want to get a girl's smile, you have to be more serious."

"I'm not lying you know. Even though I look like this, I am a priest serving the Founder, you know? Something like lying, I have never done that before, have I?"

Josette's eyes widened. Because Julio's words doesn't seem to be lies.

"Is it.....really so?"

"Of course. Look, this is a letter penned by His Holiness himself. From today on, you're under the care of the Church of Romalia."

Different from before, the abbess and priestesses gathered around Julio.

"May I ask, what is your business here?"

Seeing the unease on the abbess' face, Julio showed a letter.

"This, this is....."

"This is an edict from His Holiness."

"B-but.....we've been entrusted by the nobles of this country to supervise this place. We cannot let any of the sisters go without their permission....."

Julio smiled after hearing that.

"So who is your true master? The holy Founder? Or the nobles of this country?"

"W-well....."

"Your kind hearts have always been used by the nobles of this heart, isn't it so?

Because of their disrespect for God, they created such a 'prison', have they not? That's just too scary."

The abbess fell prostrate at Julio's feet after hearing that, shocked.

"Oh.....indeed, have you known everything?"

Julio bent down and placed a hand on the shoulder of the shuddering abbess.

"The thing about secrets, it's just very difficult to keep it. There are but a million ears in the world and the hardest thing to do in the world is shutting people's mouths."

"I'm unaware of the pasts of the children, so please don't ask me about that....."

"Relax, I'm not here as an Inquisitor."

Julio placed a bag beside the abbess.

"This is some money for all the years you've taken care of her."

Then, Julio turned to look at Josette, who watched him bewilderedly, mouth agape.

"Well then, let's go."

"Eh? Eh eh! Eh eh eh eh eh!?"

Josette's thought process came to a sudden halt. She finally could break free of this convent, and she was also going with Julio.....

It was like a dream.

Would she be, under the effect of some strange magic?

"What happened?"

Julio's soft words entered her ears.

"Wh-what is this! Everything happened so fast....."

"Yeah, this was a little too hurried. Why don't you go arrange your baggage?"

Hearing Julio's words, Josette finally snapped back to herself.

This was the real world.....

Julio was really going to bring her away.

"Are you serious?"

Asking to test the waters, Julio nodded firnly.

"This is really nerve racking, how am I going to convince you?"

Josette looked at Julio silently. his heterochromic eyes, each of a different color, displaying a coquesttish charm.

Everytime she saw those eyes.....Josette just could not stop herself.

"This is reality."

After drawing the fine line between fantasies and reality, Josette's actions immediately became as swift as the wind.....

She ran to the crowd of sisters far away, to find her most intimate friends.

She shook their hands, saying goodbye to her gaping friends.

"I thank you all for your care for me in the past. Yeah, I'm leaving this place now, you know."

"Eh? Eh eh? What the heck is going on?"

Her friends who were knee deep in chaos.

"Leaving this place."

For them, who have never thought of this way before, this was unavoidable. After all, even Josette herself has not thought it out yet, or in other words, she did not even know why Julio was taking her away.

However, there was not a shred of insecurity in her heart. As long as she was able to be together with Julio, Josette would not mind any danger she will face.

Walking briskly to the abbess' side, Josette held her hand.

"Thank you for all your care. I'll never forget your kindness."

The abbess looked at Josette with a weary face. She looked like she was going to say something, but she held back for a moment after opening her mouth.

".....Thinking back, I may have betrayed the Founder's decree. Even though it was a forced decision, but keeping girls like you in a place like this is still against the natural order. Take great care, the world outside is much different than here, it's much cruel."

Josette nodded, and then ran to Julio's side.

"Is there really no need for a baggage?"

"Nn, since there was nothing to take away anyway."

"I see. Never mind, you're going to get everything you desire soon, so maybe it's better that way."

"There's really no need for that, as long I'm with Onee san, I'm completely sastified....."

"I promise you."

After Josette was safely on the sky dragon, Julio jumped on it too.

"Well then, may the Founder bless you."

After making a declaration like something out of a movie, Julio rided the sky dragon to the clouds.

Josette gazed at the Saint Margerita's Convent as it shrunk from her aerial view. Her home, where she spent fifteen years of her life.

She watched the dormitories and the farms on the mountains.

"That was, my everything."

"You're not going to ask about why I was taking you away?"

"Yeah, but that would be meaningless."

"Aren't you scared, that maybe I'm cheating you?"

"Even if Onee san was going to bring me to hell, I have no regrets, because.....this feeling now, is real. What do I do, it's just like wings grew our of my heart, hard to control. This feeling, is a first for me."

"Are you willing to obey everything I ask you to do? If that was so, I promise that you'll get everything you want." Julio said softly.

"I was going to do so anyway. After all, I'm completely in the dark about the outside world."

Josette took in a deep breath.

Gradually, Saint Margerita's Convent disappeared from the clouds. Instead, what entered her vision was the vast Halkegenia mainland.

"Amazing.....the outside world was actually so much wider."

"Everything down there, will one day be yours, you know."

Josette smiled it off, but Julio was not smiling.

".....Onee San?"

"Let us take it back, the world that was originally yours."

Seeing Josette leave on the sky dragon from the canteen window made Louise suspect what she saw.

Julio, that was Julio, right?

That's right. Undenialbly, that was Julio. Those heterochromic eyes.....the pitiful beauty of his boyish face. And that sky dragon. There was no mistake.

His appearance was surprising enough, but his action to take Josette away made her speechless.

Why.

The answer came quick enough.

Last might, the words that had surfaced on the Founder's Prayer Book.....

"The power of "Void" can only awaken in the blood of the successors. "

Also, this was the Saint Margerita's Convent made specially to place bastard children of nobles and royalty under house arrest.

The two clues interweaved.

"Josette is the new Void user."

Perhaps, she was the replacement for the dead King Joseph.....she can't be wrong.

"I must tell the Princess immediately."

However, another voice surfaced in her heart.

"Is there really a need for this?"

As long as she stayed here secretly.....the four Void users will never come together. As long as she died here without anyone knowing, the Holy Crusade will never start.

However, just as she felt the night before, this was just purely thoughts of an escapist.

The fear of getting hurt, made her try to escape from her destiny.

Feeling useless, after all, she was hurt so deeply. Also, this may be the best way to settle it.

"What should I do?"

Nobody can answer this question.

Like before, the power to make her own decisions lay on her own hands.

What was the right answer?

"How did I really feel at the bottom of my heart?"

Does she really want to stay here for the rest of her life?"

If it was really so, why did she bring her Founder's Prayer Book and wand?

At the deep crevasses of her heart, there must be a thought to "want to do something", and that's why she brought them here.

Even if her heart was hurt, broken to infinite pieces, perhaps there was someone who still believes in her.

"There are some things that only I can do."

"There are people who are waiting for me to help them."

Louise took out the Ring of Water from her pocket. The beautiful azure blue diamond.....driving the power of the 'Void'.....the power which she could not control and has given up halfway.

If she was succesful in controlling it, would she get a little more confidence?

Lifting her head up suddenly, Louise ran to Abbess who was stil sitting on the ground, dumbstruck.

"Madam Abbess."

"W-what is it?"

"Please tell me a way to get out of here."

She told the abbess a hope in her heart that she has once ignored for a long time.

"That's impossible."

"When will the next ship arrive?"

"After three days, but they will never let you on board."

Louise bit her lips hard. Even if she tried to force her way in, in the end it would just evolve into a fiasco. Then.....

Louise jumped up again, running to her private locker beside her bed, taking out the Founder's Prayer Book, then putting on the Ring of Water hastily.(T/L: Imagine Louise as a mini Bruce Willis doing Die-Hard here. :P)

She ripped the sacred cross, which was forbidden to be taken off, from her neck.

Her bright peach-colored hair swayed in the air.

Seeing Louise like this made the sisters around her shriek.

"Va-Vanessa.....what are you....."

"I'm not Vanessa, my real name is Louise. Louise the Zero. The priestess that you all have been longing for. Remember this name well, because soon, I'll be saving this world, you know."

Running to the cliff, Louise looked at the horizon to her right. The Gallian coast loomed beyond her vision like a bow.

How far is it?

Three thousand Mails? (T/L:,Mails, a unit of measurement in ZnT)

Or even further?

Will it be ten thousand Mails?"

She did not know.

"Seriously, is this really the powers of the void? Giving me such useless spells. Hey, great Founder, isn't there any spells like 'Fly'?"

While mumbling, Louise look at the Founder's Prayer Book.

On the book, the incantation that had surfaced yesterday.

"Teleportation."

How far can she teleport to? Would she reach Romania in an instant? Or, was it just a short distance?"

She did not understand.

However, there was no time for her to hesitate.

Louise started to chant the incantations.

"Uryuhagara-subeo-kunniru."

Immediately waving her wand, unleashing her power in one shot.

In an instant, Louise's body appeared in the air about one hundred mails from the convent. Below her was the sea, shining dully.....gravity mercilessly took hold of her, and Louise fell.

While falling, Louise started to chant again.

"uryuhagara-su"

She could only chant till here, if she continued chanting she would drop into the sea! Louise's body moved slightly closer to the coast again. In the air, Louise grumbled. (T/L: This sentence needs to be checked, so just read this part with a pinch of salt)

"What the heck, I hardly moved at all!"

She only moved up a distance of about two hundred Mails from Saint Margerita's Convent. However, undaunted, Louise continued to chant.

She actually planned to teleport to the coast like this. Even though, it was not sure if she had enough will power.....but she has made her decision, and there was no turning back.

Louise fixed her gaze to the front, and started to chant again.

# Chapter 9 - Two Canes, One Crown

Two days after Julio brought Josette out of Saint Margerita's Convent.....

Charlotte, the Gallian Queen, aka Tabitha, was looking over the newly constructed palace with her ministers.

The dark evening sky cast a gloomy atmosphere over the majestic palace, but it was not enough to cover the exquisite beauty of the jade noble emblem.

Isabella, who was beside Tabitha, exclaimed, “The palace looks even more beautiful than before!”

Barberini, the Gallian Prime Minister on the other side of Tabitha said, “That's because the palace will be heralding the coming of the new queen, how can we do that with the old palace!”

Isabelle simply shot Barberini a glare and ignored him.

Barberini was extremely familiar with various age-old and modern ceremonies so he was in charge with the garden party four days later to celebrate the coronation of the new Queen of Gallia. The reception party, party seats, dinner menu, and even the schedule of the one week long party and ball was so flawlessly orchestrated by his own hand that even the Gallian nobles who were picky about details were unable to find fault with it.

Even though this person was extremely capable, Isabella did not trust the Prime Minister from Romania.

His extremely cautious ways of doing things was exactly what made Isabella raise her guard. As his ability was nothing but ordinary, she couldn't let her guard down, otherwise this country will be overtaken by him under her nose.

However, if they lost Romania's aid, Tabitha's coronation was out of their reach,

so they could not refuse him. Also, if they really did that, the monasteries and disciples of entire country will revolt against Tabitha.

Now, Isabella did not knew if Tabitha shared her concerns as she was simply gazing blankly at the new palace. What did the palace looked like was perhaps meaningless to her.

Just then, the church bell rang, signalling that it was six o'clock. Isabella sighed and turned to the ministers.

“Everyone, now is time for Her Majesty to enjoy her dinner!”

Put in other words, they can leave.

Tabitha normally took her dinner with Isabella and her mother. Of course, there was also her familiar, Sylphid.

The ministers and nobles looker at Tabitha expectantly, hoping that Her Majesty would entertain their request for a dinner with them that night. However, except the two persons and one familiar, nobody had the opportunity to eat with the queen.

Seeing the dumb looks on the ministers' faces, Isabella bowed to Tabitha and left early.

Madam Orleans was waiting for her daughter and her niece in the old dining place. She revealed a smile as she saw Isabella pulled Tabitha into the room.

“Come on, sit down, my dear daughter and Isabella. They've prepared mixed fruit salad with beef today. Oh, doesn't that smells great?”

Seeing that Tabitha and Isabella took their places beside Madam Orlean, Percerin immediately poured Happoshu(T/L: Japanese sparkling wine drunk before a meal) into their glasses.

Madam Orleans' past beauty was slowly recovering, even though it was slow, but it was undeniable. After drinking Happoshu, the three noble ladies began to chat. The one who started the conversation was always Madam Orleans. The conversations were very simple, like what dramas were popular in the city, without a trace of politics or deep rumors.

Sylphid also joined in frequently with her trademark “Chiu, chiu”.....

During these times Isabella will feel herself purged of her wrongdoings and sins, without those, Tabitha felt just like a irreplaceable sister to her.

That was.....a feeling she had when she was a child.

Now, Isabella was a secret aide to Tabitha to help consolidate Tabitha's position as the new monarch.

“Hey, Helene.”

Unknowing, Sylphid has already collapsed on the table, snoring in a drunken stupor. Isabella took the opportunity to call out Tabitha's nickname while everyone was quiet. In front of the ministers she called Tabitha “Your majesty”, but in private she preferred to be more intimate, like their childhood times.

“I don't think letting Barberini take care of so many important things is a good idea.”

Tabitha shook her head.

“It's just the tip of the iceberg.”

In other words, it was a gimmick that would keep him away from the core. Isabella nodded after she heard Tabitha. The garden party arrangement seemed important, but it was nothing of central political importance.

“Okay then. Also, I was thinking of sending the 'knights' to spy on him, what do you think?”

Considering it for a moment, Tabitha nodded her agreement.

“Thank you.”

Actually, Isabella has already placed a few eyes into Barberini's side. Everyone that has been to his place, every letter, and even the menu of his dinner is at the Isabella's fingertips.

Even though there was not any suspicious activity, she could not afford to let

him go past her nose easily. As the leader of the North Garden Knights, Isabella was well accustomed to the antics behind the scenes in Romania. Since they had been ruling the world as the main church of Founder Brimir for thousands of years, their power cannot be underestimated.

“Hmm? What are you girls discussing about?”

Hearing such care from her aunt, Isabella shook her head.

“Nothing, Auntie.”

Since few weeks before, Isabella has been viewing her aunt as her mother, so Isabella can't bear to let her worry.

While Madam Orleans also treated Isabella and Tabitha equally.

“Any way, congratulation on the upcoming garden party.”

Madam Orleans said nonchalantly while quietly stuffing food into Tabitha's mouth.

“Mother, do you still don't want to go to the party?”

Madam Orleans shook her head.

“Sorry, but I don't wish to participate in such social activities anymore.”

Tabitha stopped, looking a little disappointed. Tabitha, who was normally expressionless in front of her ministers, would reveal her true feelings in front of her intimate family.

Seeing her daughter like this, Madam Orleans took Tabitha's hand.

“Because, even without me, you can still take care of the visitors perfectly!”

Tabitha nodded her head once. “Un.”

I will protect this mother and daughter—Every time she was touched by such a heart warming scene during dinner, Isabella would swear in her heart.

After dinner, Tabitha came to the newly built Grand Troyes Palace, and entered

her quarters.

“Fuuaah....my stomach's so full, Sylphid will go to bed now!”

Sylphid reached a corner of the room, laid down on a pile of clothes and slept soundly.

On the bed, the gown brought by the maid servants during the day was strewn across the bed.

During the garden party, Tabitha would have to change a set of clothes every morning, afternoon and night. Made by professional tailors of the country, the beautiful gown, made out for the queen was waiting to be worn.

Tabitha took one of the clothes and held it before herself. It was a lacy dress, covered in infinite minuscule holes, allowing others to take a glimpse of the body underneath. However, important parts are still covered decently.

Tabitha felt a little worried if her little body would fit the wonderfully designed dress.

“Why would I be worrying about this?”

When she realised the reason, Tabitha'face went red. She took the list of delegates on the table. Her eyes stopped at the last name of the delegates from the Tristan empire.

“The Tristan Minister of Diplomatic Relations-cum-Vice Commander of the Knight Corps of the Water Spirit , Saito De Hiraga Des Ornières.

Maybe he was appointed as one of delegates because of his relation with her before in the academy. His name has also become longer so he seems to have been awarded a land title.

What kind of land was it?

The kind with a mansion?

What kinds of crops do they have there, and what about the people there?”

Also, Louise who has a perpetually sour face was also living with him, right?

Tabitha imagined Saito's new residence, Des Ornières, which she has never seen before.

“I could finally see him again.”

She felt that ages has past since their last meeting at the Lelion river. Then, she agreed to put on the crown under the urgings of the fake Saito.

Tabitha bore a deep grudge over that incident, so she tried not to think of Saito.....

However, the thought of meeting him in a few days time made her uncontrollably happy.

He already has a lover, and her name also appeared on the list. She was Tabitha's friend, also someone she respected deeply, even though she did not approve of the way she treated Saito.

“I could just, dance with him for one song.”

Right, a dance.

With him.

Dancing with delegates of other countries is also one of the aspects in diplomatic relations, so it was something extremely ordinary no matter how one sees it.

What should she wear then?

The lace net gown came into her vision again. Tabitha held it up with both of her hands, staring at it.

After making sure that Sylphid was fast asleep, Tabitha soundlessly took off all her clothes and put on the gown.

……

Naturally, as Tabitha has expected, the gown fit her snugly. Her inner clothing were exposed through the minuscule holes.

What kind of underwear did the designer had in mind while he was designing the gown? It probably was not the kind wore in the bedroom.

Bedroom.....

Tabitha's cheeks flushed as she sunk deeper into her imagination.

“I've become a strange person.”

Shaking her head, she took up another gown. This was sewn with black glossy cloth with a beautiful dark glow, but it was far more modest.

However, after she wore it, Tabitha noticed that the gown fitted her body tightly at the part above her thighs, sketching the curve of her body line, showing her immature figure clearly for all to see. If she were to enter the ballroom like that, any further imagination of her dance partner were sure to be crushed.

But.....maybe Saito liked this kind of body shape. After all, just by looking at Louise's body, no one would think that she had anything to show off at all.

Either way, she didn't need to care so much about that.

Thinking about this, Tabitha smiled softly.

“Now, I should be.....very happy.”

Even though her position as the queen made her uneasy, but the Gallian nobles were capable and powerful, so even though there was an exchange in power, the country has not dissolved into ruin. Also, living here with her family made her feel safe and warm. Tabitha felt that the happy feelings of home were starting to return.

Romania was still an unknown variable, but currently they have made no obvious moves.

Also, she was going to meet her sweetheart, Saito, in a few days time.

She might even get to dance with him.

Just as a smile blossomed on Tabitha's face, her father's face flashed through her

mind.

And her uncle's face.

Misscoeur, who tortured her countless times.

And also the generals and soldiers who sacrificed their lives at the Lelion river.

Tabitha also thought of Lieutenant Bart, who always waved at her from the deck after completing his mission, and that commander with a sunburnt face, but they are not in this world anymore.

Her calm and happy life was built on the sacrifices of those nobles and soldiers who fought in this war for the throne, and that fact was like a frigid gust sneaking past a crack in the windowpane, chilling her heart.

“Happiness is too much of a luxury to me.”

Tabitha sunk into such a emotional mud pit.

Just then, a knocking sound came from the window.

The window?

Would it just be a trick of the wind? That thought flashed through Tabitha's mind. The curtains were too thick for her to see what was going on outside. However, the outside of the window was the balcony, so that would not be a problem.

Maybe it was Sylphid? But it was still snoring in the corner of the room.

Bang, bang.....

The noise came again. There was unmistakably someone outside banging the window. Tabitha gripped the staff beside her bed.

Tabitha did not arrange for personal guards, because she had something that was more useful than personal guards. Also, the personal guards themselves were something that might threaten her safety.

Sneaking to the window, Tabitha queitly pulled the curtains apart.

At the other side of the window.....is herself.

For a moment there, Tabitha thought that that was her reflection, but she immediately noticed something different.

The other her on the other side of the window was wearing different clothes.

The same ice blue hair, the same glasses, the person could have been her own duplicate..... The word“Skirni” flashed through her mind, that was a puppet that could shape shift into a person after sucking their blood.

It could also be a golem.....

However, Tabitha understood that the person standing at the other side was a body of human flesh and blood.

…... Who was it?

Me? She thought.

The strong revelation robbed Tabitha of her warrior's intuition. She noticed too late that someone had opened the window beside her and entered the room.

Someone gripped her staff, making Tabitha turn reflexively.

Left and right eyes of different colour respectively—it was Julio.

Tabitha aimed a kick at Julio's abdomen, but Julio twisted his body and dodged. He then used a cloth to cover Tabitha's face.

There was sleeping potion on the cloth, Tabitha noticed before collapsing on the bed.

Hearing that sound, Sylphid finally waked up, and saw Julio standing there and Tabitha who has collapsed. She ran hastily to them.

“What happened! What did you do to Onee-sama!”

After that, Sylphid noticed someone else entering the room from the window and stopped.

“Eh? There is another Onee-sama.....”

Julio calmly walked towards Sylphid and placed his right hand on its shoulder. Then, the runes on his hands glowed.

Kyui.....kyui.....

“Anyhow, you're a 'beast', right, Rhythm dragon familiar? I'm also a familiar, called Wendalfr, so I can control 'beast's like you. So.....”

Seeing Julio place the sleeping Tabitha and Sylphid on the bed, the girl who looked like Tabitha said timidly, “Onee-san, what is this.....”

“She is the daughter of the person who locked you up in that place.”

Josette looked at the girl who has collapsed.

The face was what she saw in the mirror yesterday.

After Julio brought her outside, Josette followed him into a monastery and obeyed his instructions to take off her necklace.

After that.....she felt as if her face was released from some spell, her hair was also glowing. After seeing herself in the mirror, Josette was shocked to see that her face was not the same as before.

A spell was placed on you to change your face and hair—that was what Julio said to her.

The face in the mirror yesterday and the face of the sleeping girls were from the same mould, impossible to differentiate.

“This is how I look like.” However, reality had a severe lack of realism, the iridescent ice blue hair colour made even her uncomfortable.

Also, where was she?

She rode Julio's wind dragon to this place.....it was a building encased in moonlight, unimaginably huge, majestic and beautiful.

For Josette who has only known Saint Margarita's Convent, this was like dreamland.

As for the girl who lived here, who had the exact same face as her, who wasshe.....

“I was imprisoned?”

Julio nodded.

“You're a royalty of the Gallian empire.....or more correctly, you are the daughter of the deceased Des Orleans Charlotte. And she is..... your twin sister.”

The Gallian empire?

Royalty?

Twin?

Impossible things continued to tumble out of Julio's mouth. Josette suddenly remembered what the sisters said in the convent.

“I am, an abandoned child of a noble.....”

“I cannot believe it. I am, some royalty of the Gallian Empire.”

The land around Saint Margarita's Convent, belonged to this empire called Gallia. There, should be the place where someone called the king or nobles lived.....the thing that was downright unbelievable was that she was born in the family that governed the entire empire.

“My twin sister.....”

Josette took a glimpse at Tabitha's face. This was the first time she saw her own family.....but there was no recollection in her heart.

“Then, what do you want?”

“Actually, it's not much anyway. You, from this day on, will be the ruler of the Gallian empire.”

His words, like making up a joke, made Josette freeze. However, this was not a joking matter, as there was no hint of playfulness in Julio's eyes.

“I am, a ruler? Impossible! Anyhow, if I'm king, what will happen to that girl? This should be my big sister.....”

“Of course, she will return to the convent and become Josette.”

Hearing this made Josette understand.

“You brought me out, for this?”

Julio nodded firmly.

Josette's heart was swept by a wave of sadness. Even though she was not to become her real self, but if she was able to stay at Julio's side.....did Julio have the same thought as her?

Alas, reality was not so, he just wanted to use her.....

Josette did not express her feelings.

She suddenly understood Vanessa's feelings.

“Even though I'm happy, but it was built on lies.”

Even though it looked so radiant and beautiful, but it was really fading continuously.

Josette pressed her lips together firmly.

If.....I escaped from here, I will be the same as Vanessa.

“The feelings I had before were true. That, I will never back down from. Never.”

She has already decided, to believe him. No matter what happened.....no matter what kind of reality.

“What should I do now?”Her eyes became as determined as ever, Josette asked.

“Nothing. Just stand there and listen to what I say. I'll tell you what to do or say, just follow what I say.

“And all that, for Onee-san?”

“Not only for me, but also for you.....”

Hearing Julio say that, Josette shook her head.

“No, never mind what happens to me. As long as it's for Onee-san, then that's enough.”

Julio's ever present smile collapsed.

“Ah, if it's for me, then follow what I say.”

“No problem, Onee-san. Let's make a promise to each other. From now on, tell me everything, every thought, the truth behind everything. From now on, never hurt me, or betray me. As long as you do that, I'll listen to what Onee-san says.

“Alright then, that's a promise.” Julio nodded.

“And one more thing.”

“What?”

“Kiss me.”

Staring straight at Julio, Josette spoke her wish. Julio tipped Josette's chin and placed his lips on Josette's. Just as their lips met, Josette closed her eyes.

After their lips parted, Julio looked into Josette's eyes and said, “Be my woman.”

His sincerity was impossible to determine from his voice. It was not the words he usually used, but the meaning behind those words, for Josette, is the best.

Feeling satisfied, Josette said, “That was my plan all along.”

The next day.....

While Madam Orleans was eating her breakfast, Barberini said, “Speaking law while eating is quite uncouth, your majesty the queen dowager.”(T/L:
)

“What happened?”

Madam Orleans' tone hid an icy demeanour. This Barberini from Romania was not exactly someone she liked.

During that time, only Percerin was in the dining room, Barberini's gaze made Madam Orleans extremely uncomfortable, so she urged, “Percerin, why don't you go check on the flowers in the backyard. Hopefully they have not wilt under the summer heat.”

After Percerin left the room, Barberini said something shocking.

“I'm sorry, your majesty, but I'm here today to pardon your majesty.”

“Pardon? What were you thinking from this morning? What sins did I commit? I, who is living here so quietly, everyday?”

“No matter the person, they will commit a sin that they don't want anybody else to know. Even the Gallian empress dowager. Or more accurately, you've forgotten your sin.”

“You're saying that you're sure that I've committed a sin?”

“Yes, and if it were possible, I do hope that you can remember.”

“Oh yeah, such is the power of Romanian Cardinals, you see through everything. That was three days ago, the flowers that I planted wilted. How do you put it, in an enclosed place like this, I've completely forgotten about the change in the seasons, and did not notice about the flowers assaulted by the heat. That is truly a sin.”

“That is the lives of flowers, but I'm talking about a larger sin.”

“Oh yeah, it seems that it's not only the flowers that was sickened by the heat, it seems that you are also affected by it.”

“Your majesty, I'm not joking, this is a serious matter.”

“I'm going to call the guards.”

Hearing her angry words, Barberini shook his head.

“I apologise for just now, one can't help if she doesn't remember at all. After all, the sin that your majesty has committed, is something long ago.....or more accurately, it was something that happened during the birth of Queen Charlotte her majesty.”

Barberini's words made Madam Orleans' face go green.

“What are you talking about?”

“Let me sketch it out then. Year 6227, during the month of Teru, the week of Femdar, the day of Eo (T/L: ,,), the room of Duke Orleans was filled with such brilliance, Charlotte, the Duke of Orleans was waiting for a birth of a child.”

“Er, I remember, that was the day when my daughter was born.”

Feeling something rumble in her heart, Madam Orleans' voice started to shake.

“When Duke Orleans heard the cry of the baby, it was nine o'clock in the morning...”

“It was eight o'clock, five minutes past.”

Madam Orleans' voice shaking was very obvious.

“Is that so. However, during that time, there was not only one baby who cried. After a few minutes, another cry was heard.”

Madam Orleans held her face in her hands in anguish, shaking her head vigorously.

“I know the meaning of the Gallian family crest. Two wands intersecting each other, holding a crown, it acts as a warning and to comfort for the twin brothers who perished after their fight for the crown.....And from that day on, twins are taboo among the Gallian royalty. However, how does one factor in the love of kinship? A taboo among royalty, but sisters of the same blood, sisters who look exactly alike, casting one into hell and the other into heaven, how does this relate to love?”

Madam Orleans barely managed to squeeze out a question.

“.....Who are you?”

“Your majesty, everybody then, stubbornly held this secret from the world. However, humans will never bring their sins to the grave. Last year, I heard someone's confessing before her death, and pardoned her. That person, is the midwife who assisted in your majesty's delivery.”

“You, have just lost all credibility as a cleric.”

“The doctrine, exist for God. If what one did is for God, then that would not be a sin.”

“So that's it. You're here to pardon me for this. Since you've known everything, then you should have understood. It's true that that day, we have given birth to two lives. But during that time, we only had two choices, one of which is to end her life, and the other is to send her to some unknown place for someone else to raise her. We had no other choice! That was our responsibility as royalty!”

Madam Orleans started to sob.

“God has already forgiven you. I'm not here to ask you about your sins. Don't you want to make up for the abandoned child?”

“.....Er?”

The next second.....A girl appeared in front of Madam Orleans, with the same hairstyle as Tabitha, and even the same design of glasses.

However, just one glimpse made Madam Orleans understand her identity.

“Oh.....How can this be.....Can this be.....such things.....”

She shakily picked herself up, and hugged the dazed young girl.

“.....Mother?”

“I hope that you can forgive.....forgive mother.....no power.....your mother who had no power to save you.....”

Tears of regret flowed uncontrollably down her face. An unexpected meeting, another Charlotte.....she didn't even gave her a name.

Josette, dazed, was touched by her mother's affection, and tears also unconsciously ran down her face. Her mother, who she never knew of, who she met since she was sensible, but unknowingly, Josette managed to understand the feelings of her mother.

Hugging her daughter, Madam Orleans' tears went on a rampage.

“You've finally come back. Can you forgive your mother?”

“What is there to forgive, for I've never resented anything. I only knew the truth yesterday.”

Hearing Josette's words, Madam Orleans nodded.

“Now, the heck with royalty and taboos, from now on, your sister, cousin, me, we'll continue to live as a family.”

Madam Orleans' voice was shaking as her heart throbbed.

“Prime Minister, thank you very much. Can you call her majesty down, the three of us will have breakfast together.”

Then, Barberini's expression was as if he heard something strange.

“Prime Minister?”

“Your majesty, I can't do that.”

“You can't be joking,” said Madam Orleans. However, Barberini's face was devoid of any hint of jest.

“I'm not joking. Isn't this her majesty herself? I don't see any difference.”

Madam Orleans did not answer, understanding between the lines. Charlotte, and

another Charlotte. Even though their birth was seperated by a few seconds, but their fates have gone on completely different paths.

“Don't you dare think the royal taboo is anything simple! If this things gets blown, how many nobles of this country will revolt? Not only the royalty, even among those nobles who are loyal to royalty, there were never just one or two children who died because of this taboo!”

Her voice agitated, Madam Orleans looked at her daughter. Josette turned her head away.

“Is that so! I've never thought about this. However, someone I trust told me that I could only be happy through this way. Isn't it impossible for me to live with big sister?”

Josette looked at her mother.

“However, if mother insists, I'll go back to the convent.”

This was, Josette's real wish.....

However, Madam Orleans was unable to ask her to go back to the convent. Something like that day, how could she go through it again? A girl, who has lived her life in an unknown convent by herself, with no one to take care of her, how could she ask such a thing from her?

Seeing Madam Orleans who was kneeling in anguish on the bed, Barberini moved closer.

“God has always taught men that all men are created equal. If you can't give your daughter the light, then give her both light and darkness, isn't it so?

# Chapter 10 - Garden Party to Celebrate the Enthronement

It happened in the first week of Ansuul, Hagar the day of Freya.

In order to attend the garden party, the most recognized Tristain nobles turned their caravans and head towards Versailles.

Heading towards the territory of Gallia, the main caravan of Tristain finally arrived at the docks of the port city of An-Re.

The view of the all vessels, which belong to all nations of Halkeginia stationed in the port of this giant lake, was truly admirable.

Once ashore, the main caravan of Queen Henrietta went "Varsenda" from then it would take about 4 hours to reach Versailles via wagon. Unfortunately, at the time they were about to leave, the harsh summer sun slowed their progress.

Then they decided to take a break in a place after crossing the bridge of La-Vaare. However, if they were to meet with the ambassadors of Gallia on time, the caravan would need to continue immediately. Along the main road they could see the growing commotion that produced such movement of people, and throughout the surrounding area that were ones without houses, people now crushed as if a festival was happening.

The first thing to consider that time was the arrangement of Queen Henrietta’s tent.

So the pages and some soldiers started collecting straw bales from the surrounding houses, which were used to construct a couch.

Soon, some farmers at that place had started selling baskets of fresh bread and fruit to the members of the caravan. Even some vendors were able to provide

wine. After a moment as it was expected, the sounds of laughter and singing could be heard everywhere.

Among the buyers were the Ondine Knights who had a good supply of wine and snacks, which give them a desire to join the growing commotion. Even for this selected group of the queen, it seemed that the current conditions were nice enough to want the ‘enjoyment‘ provided by this small town.

Besides, it was fair to all those present, both noble and soldiers, to be allowed a little fun, after the constant battle they had to fight recently.

Even so, within the happy commotion had arisen, a face that did not appear anywhere in the festival can be seen.

“Haa……”

It was Saito.

Over the course of two weeks, he was devoted to a frantic search for Louise, however after his arrival at the first provincial town, the traces of the whereabouts of Louise disappeared.

No matter where he look, no matter who he asked, he could not find signs of Louise anywhere. So as expected, because of the growing anxiety on the part of parents and sisters of Louise, they, themselves, organized a search party. That was the information he had obtained from the letter sent by Cattleya.

Saito had planned to make a home visit to La Vallière and report everything so far, however:

"Due to the circumstances, it would be a great inconvenience if my careless father came to kill you, so I ask you right now to refrain from visiting La Vallière". Saito read the letter.

Ultimately, Saito was convinced to leave the search to them, so that he could return to fulfill his obligations. This is the reason why Saito at this time was one of the members of the caravan ambassadors.

He had no choice, he had to fulfill his duty as part of the bureau of negotiations, including the part he was to Louise ...

But ... after unsuccessfully searching her relentlessly for two weeks. *Saito, do you really think you'll be able to meet her again?*

While he was lost in these thoughts, Saito had walked away from his official duties.

The crestfallen and heartbroken Saito decided to leave the caravan to a place where he could be alone. Then with a stick he picked up off the floor he began to sting the earth.

*I cannot be with Louise.*

When thinking about this, it seemed that he had lost all the urges to continue with his life. Nothing mattered. Not the fact that he let the people who attacked him escape, nor the party to celebrate the coronation, nothing in the world seemed real, he came to believe that what he saw with his eyes was seen only as a spectator who was in front of the TV.

Tapping the earth once again and Saito suddenly found himself drawing the figure of Louise on earth.

His grief, desperation and pathos gathered everyone in a sad view of what was Saito now.

"Peach hair, oh-so pretty, lit-tle girl, who took you away..."

As Saito sang his version of a kindergarten nursery rhyme, he ended his drawing to see it well and did not know if what he had drawn was Louise or an alien.

When Saito came to these conditions, Siesta, without fail, always appeared and try to encourage him, however at this time she was in Des Ornières. She along with Professor Colbert had decided to stay if Louise finally returned to Des Ornières.

“But why put on an ugly face? Now do not worry, just drink!”

Malicorne had come to say this, only to put a bottle of wine in Saito’s mouth.

“Gu Fuh gugugugugugugu!”

Malicorne didn't stop until the wine bottle was empty, then detached it from the mouth of Saito with a "PPAH".

“What do you think you're doing?”

“Really, that face you were making ... Like I say, Louise is not coming back, so give up.”

“B, but that would be ...”

“If I will tell you in the clearest way possible, she does not want to see you anymore, can you even realize the significance of her actions?”

Due to shock Saito dropped to his knees on the floor while a sudden tremor came from his body.

Then Guiche and others who could not pass unnoticed by their actions, promptly withdrew Malicorne from Saito’s side.

“Oh, hey, that's wrong, and let me go!”

“But you're saying...”

Then Malicorne addressed them with an emphatic scream and said:

“You see, it has to be now, do not you think this is a critical time to see if Saito may or may not become a man? You know, a man must accept a separation and approach it as an aspect of himself, this is what makes one grow as a person. Now what this guy needs is to face reality." After saying this Malicorne could not stop assenting himself, as if what he had said was the absolute truth.

“Certainly much of your impromptu speech is true, but…” This was added by Kirche, who was very overwhelmed by her desire to return to see her friend Tabitha, also appeared on the scene accompanied by Tiffania.

“This is very problematic.” Tiffania said. Malicorne shook his head.

Then with a gentle gaze he began to approach her. Tiffania reacted immediately and placed both of her hands against her chest, as a precaution to what she knew was coming.

“Miss Westwood, actually ...”

In the instant Malicorne said that, Tiffania instinctively shook his head.

“No!”

“But I did not say anything.”

“No matter what you say, I can ensure those 'things' are rare.”

At this rate, Malicorne the only thing could do was to show a smile full of sadness on his face.

“Ahh I give up ... I guess that's what I get for doing what I always do, but since ... but this time I swear I was going to say something serious.”

After this strange apology, Tiffania could not help but give it a try.

“Well, you mean.”

“Well, ... Did you not please Saito, with those big breasts?”

With an unpleasant feeling, they heard these words arise from a disturbingly eloquent Malicorne, his tone nevertheless actually showed off that he said it was for the sake of his friend. His serene face only further helped convince others of his pure intentions, but in the end, everyone was frustrated by his lack of tact, saying the worst possible words.

“As I thought, you see, when one is depressed you must have breasts, and most importantly they gotta be huge, if you think there can not be any better. And indeed, those breasts ... we have the owner of those breasts, after all I do not think there is anyone more qualified than you Miss Westwood.”

As expected to happened, Tiffania seemed disposed to use the Void, she was heaving and started waving her wand, but despite this Malicorne did not stop his words.

“Magic? You're thinking of using it? You used that to help Saito before, right? Then use that to help Saito now! Seriously just do it for the good of Saito!”

“Ei.” After reciting a little spell, Tiffania waved her hand.

“I'm a chicken! Pío, pio, pio, pio.”

Then Malicorne left the area while shaking his arms like wings.

After what happened, Tiffania glanced toward Saito and then approached him.

What she found was a disabled Saito muttering only nonsense. Seeing him in that state, Tiffania could not help but feel a great sadness.

“Saito do not worry, I assure you fully that Louise will come back, and when she do be sure to apologize to her properly, do you understand?

“Really? Really she'll come back again...?”

Tiffania nodded sweetly to that question.

“Do not worry, Louise really likes to return to do her job, I guarantee you that she will return home ...”

Tiffania kept saying this over and over again to comfort Saito.

In her tent, Queen Henrietta was preparing to hear the report of Agnes, which only a moment ago had just arrived on her horse at full gallop.

“You finally arrived.” Henrietta said who let out a sigh.

The report was about the discovered information about the criminal group that attacked Saito in the village Cherphis, then Agnes continued relating the research findings.

However, the information obtained after the completion of the research process was still incomplete.

“We are sure to inspect in details the entire area where the village is located, Cherphis but ... still we could not find a trace of the criminal group. Also it was

reported that investigations carried out simultaneously to the nobles that you suspect or have motive of some resentment against Chevalier Hiraga-dono yet ..."

Then to see the difficulty in Agnes to describe the situation with words, Henrietta deduced the reason for his distress.

"Too many, that's what you're saying right?"

"It's just as you say, the main reason seems to be his position as a commoner who acquired a peerage but apart from the above I can not imagine anything more, plus you have to add the fact that although he was popular with the masses it might arouse jealousy among them for his privileged position."

Therefore, apart from the families of the students of the academy of magic, arguably everyone can have a reason to attack, if I may be frank, this is a situation where you will not get anywhere from research only.

Then Henrietta had no other choice but to assent to the conclusion of Agnes, and then thought to himself: *What would have happened if he had also been given the title of Baron ...*

"But we also have something even in our behalf, investigations ultimately yielded to a significant trail."

"Please say what you have learned."

"It's the name of the group that dominates the underworld, is the result maybe of infiltration of Tristainian kingdom."

"The underworld?"

"Yes, apparently a group specializing in dirty jobs, some individuals with incredible skills, apparently belonging to the army of Gallia, what was the name ...? oh yeah they are the members of the Order of Chevalier of North Partel, as reported in Tristain, they managed to sneak into the change of government after abruptly raised by Gallia."

The North Chevalier Partel, the secret order of knights of Gallia, Henrietta was also aware of the rumors that were said about them. Military intelligence,

murders ... an order of chivalry dedicated to shady jobs, gentlemen who were engaged to what a gentleman would not do.

“This so called "group" right?”

“Yes, the 'Elemental Siblings', that's how they name their group.”

Then Henrietta recalled the words of Saito, when the woman who attacked him called "onii-sama" to her partner ...

“If I'm pretty sure they are.”

“In fact, by various rumors circulating in the kingdom, I have heard of them several times, they work like ghosts, they never let their prey escape, and also ... they are known for never having failed in one of their missions.”

“But Saito-dono returned alive. They only get him knocked out ...”

“I do not know why, but it may be the case that their mission was only to intimidate.”

“If that was the reason, he was lucky, but…”

“But the next time may not be so good.”

Then with a mortified expression on her face Henrietta shook her head.

“Perhaps we could offer a reward, giving citizens a promotion to give us help with the case.”

“That's an interesting idea however, it is likely that the whole thing might end up in chaos.”

*As imagined, right now is when I think I should marry an influential nobleman to have their support. How can I even be able to protect one of my knights?!*

Even knowing what was the cause, Henrietta could not help but feel disappointed to Louise, who had just disappeared leaving her duty, and now she was really needed.

“ ... Oh I envy it, to live only for love!”

“What are you trying to say?”

“No ... It's nothing.”

“Please, I wish you were more considerate and to think in my position, because in reality I have nothing, at least I would like to try comfort you a little, in these times when you really need it ...”

The caravan had finally arrived at Versailles. The members were assigned to a guest house, but even having said that, the truth was that they only prepared the rooms for Queen Henrietta and a few members of her cabinet. As for members of guards, that includes the knights and soldiers, they have been assigned only on the field where they installed hospedasen tents.

"As of tomorrow it will be a busy day due to the celebration, so please take the time today to rest calmly" this was the message that the emissaries of Gallia left for the visitors of the guest house. Then they exited the lobby to continue their activities.

After talking to Agnes and the ladies of the court, Henrietta was left alone in her room. She had several things in mind for the long awaited garden party.

But the main reason for her visit was definitely checking the true intentions of the new Queen Charlotte. Queen Charlotte who had decided to join forces with Romalia to achieve her crowning ... *Could it be that her cooperation with Romalia, was because they wanted to continue the crusade?* Precisely that was the matter Henrietta wanted to confirm.

Even knowing they were at critical moments ... the government was fighting to stabilize the kingdom for they allowed knights of plebeian origin, only showing jealousy, and someone out there had even hired a murderer to realize their hatred. And Louise just thinking about it without consideration for others fled to disappear completely.

“Everyone is so selfish. Is there no one who feels a real desire to help others?”

Henrietta then summoned Saito, thought at least to take a walk with him to clear her head. She also considered talking to him concerning her meeting with the Queen of Gallia and also she had to deal with the issue of the group that attacked him. All this was imperative to notify.

But the main reason for calling him was...

"I want to see him."

She just wanted to be with him and see his face, she had raised a number of reasons, but in the end her desire to meet him was what drove her actions.

Henrietta then rang a bell to call one of her servants.

“At this moment I feel like taking a little ride... then, I must also discuss official matters with him, please send Chevalier Hiraga-dono of Ondine Brigade.”

In just a moment, the servant had brought Saito in the presence of the queen.

Then with a face as if experiencing an extreme fatigue and a total lack of strength Saito said:

“You called me?”

“Yes, I’ll take a walk, and I command you to be my escort.”

Then Saito fully recovered his composure and give the queen a respectful reverence. Due to the sudden seriousness of Saito, Henrietta could not help but feel little weird for her actions.

All the way from her room to the exit in the lobby, Henrietta showed her face like a queen of exemplary decency, which even for a moment showed signs of familiarity with her escort Saito, who was always a step behind her.

But at that very moment, the guest house of Versailles seemed to have become a popular social meeting place, everywhere eminent nobles were dressed in their most splendid attire, they along with the ambassadors, could be seen happy and enjoying their casual talks.

As the queen passed by, those nobles noticing her presence, recovered their

composure and made a bow. However, as if they were just air, Henrietta walked past them ignoring them because this was not an official event and she did not look for an obligation to greet them, but although she did ignore them only for practical reasons, she did not seem to dislike their attitude.

When you stopped and saw her, Henrietta was seen as a magnificent queen, despite appearing to forget those who were around her, her Majesty’s presence was enough for them, and by her side Saito did not seem, at this moment, to have the slightest interest for Queen Henrietta.

Then Saito thought could it be possible the Henrietta that he had seen that time in that little inn ... and also at that time in the basement of Des Ornières, be the same person?

Outside the guest house, the day seemed to be coming to an end in order to give way to night, but they found the large amount of people out there, which was composed of all those invited foreign nations, surpassed by far the fuss found before them.

Then Henrietta decided to hide behind the hood of her robe.

The Palace of Versailles was broad, almost the same dimensions as the country through which they passed en route to here.

In their walk they came to a large garden full of flowering shrubs, which by its composition resembled a maze, the shrubs of the place were filled with summer blue flowers, which they did not know the name.

So without a second thought Henrietta set out to explore it, entering the labyrinth ...

In their trek through the maze they found a small bench, Henrietta sat down and removed her hood.

With the flowers' essence combined with the cool dampness from the plants, the rigid presence of Henrietta vanished. Then with an air like a young villager, she stretched her body before heading to Saito.

“You should also sit down,” said Henrietta with a melodious voice.

Saito then sat down beside her.

“I did not want anyone to hear us.”

Hearing this, Henrietta felt a bit of excitement.

“No, actually this isn't anything of such importance,” she said.

Then Saito nodded to her in a crude form.

Lately, this was the condition in which they developed the meetings between them, as an implicit agreement that they avoided each other talking, to break the tension, the first to say something was Henrietta.

“It will be tomorrow . . . how should I explain it . . . about Queen Charlotte. I wonder what are her true intentions, I want to find out what are the circumstances that are still involved with Romalia.”

“Yes.”

Saito's voice which sounded as if it came from an empty place, evidenced by his lack of courage.

“Also ... the information concerning the thugs who attacked you, apparently they are known as the "Elemental Siblings" and are a group coming from Gallia which specializes in dirty jobs, a subject quite dangerous ...”

“They really are.“ Saito said without showing any sign of strength.

“You speak as if talking of matters concerning another person. You should get out of that depression, for your sake and that of others.”

“Sorry, but ... as is, there's no more strength left in me, I know that what I say is unacceptable but ..."

Henrietta then furrowed her brows, she felt as if the words of Saito were trying to blame her for something.

“Everything you say, it seems as if everything was my fault!”

“Huh?”

Saito stared at Henrietta for a moment, he could see the anger in her eyes, then Saito worriedly said,

“E, that is... course not. Here I am the only culprit. I was the one...”

“Tell me, what perhaps did we do something wrong?” said Henrietta and then she pressed her lips.

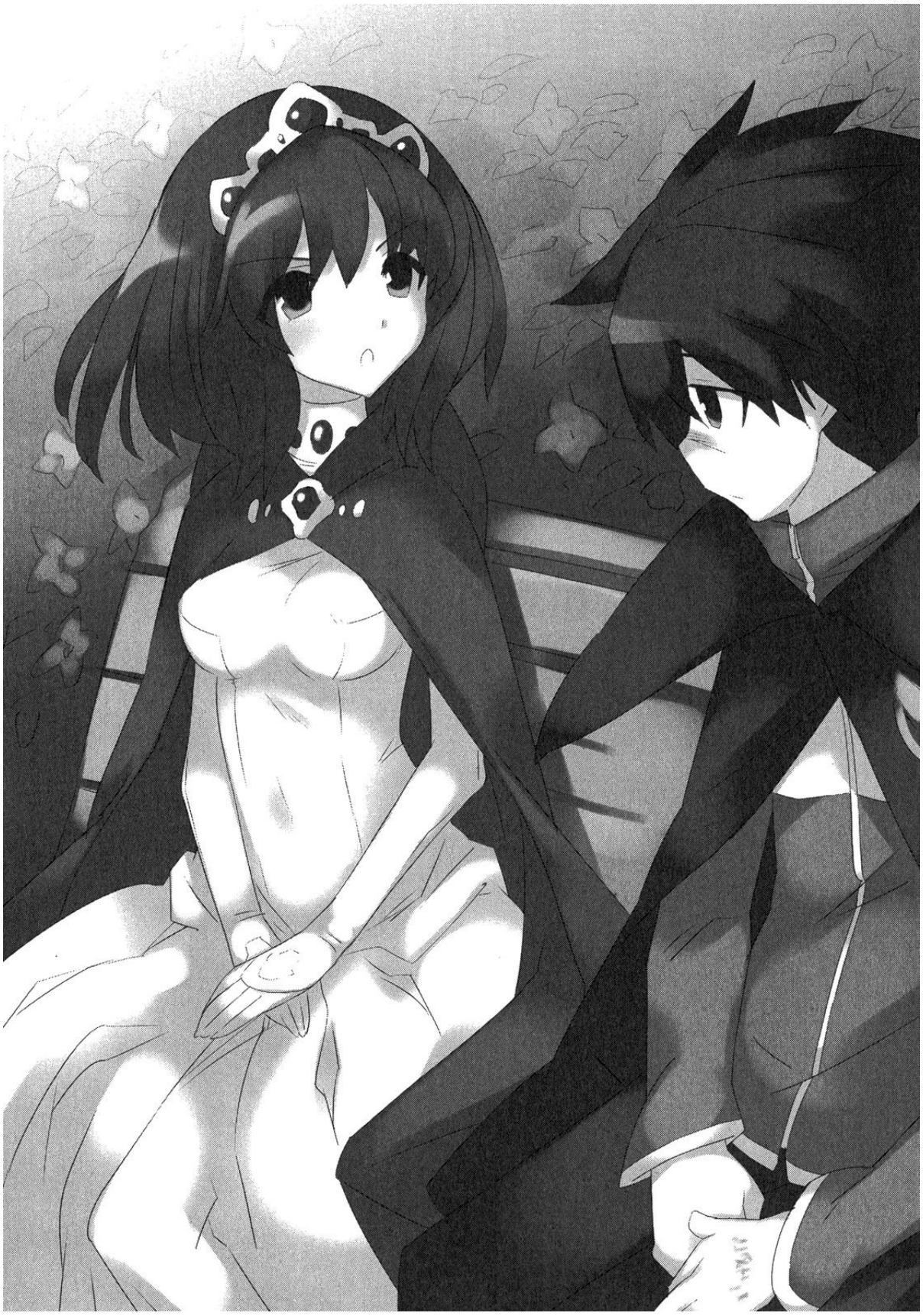
“Well, that would be...”

“Louise is gone, at this time we cannot do anything about it, we can not conclude her true intentions, and yet you aren't able to act according to your own feelings. If so, let me be the only one receiving the consequences of that sin, but then maybe ... you would have not...”

“Huh?”

“You would not have the right to feel so dejected as how you feel now!”

Saito then lowered his head in embarrassment.



“ ... Not that I can accept my own feelings!”

After hearing this, Henrietta gave Saito a cold stare.

“ ... You don't look like a man!”

“What did you say?”

“It's not like you lost control of yourself for lust, right? It seems that you're blaming me for having been seduced, that so numb!”

“And was it not!?”

“Where did you get that idea, please tell me!”

“Seriously, you're wondering what you've done!? That's what you're saying?”

Upon hearing these mean words, Henrietta looked back at Saito with disdain.

“That was just, something you wanted to do on your own not that I tried to seduce you or something.”

“Well, I, I do not remember it has been like that! With all the sensuality that I didn't try to hide for a second.”

“You say that everything was the fault of sensuality, that's all you have to say?”

Defeated, Saito lost his strength again and dropped his shoulders.

“.. . If I had to say it in a way, is that I did not realize what I had until I lost it, I realized that I need Louise at my side, and so I really want it, that I do not fight these 70000 soldiers to rescue Tristain, I did it to save Louise. Because Louise was here, I decided to stay in this world.”

“And now that Louise has disappeared, you’re leaving everything you set out and go back to your world, is that the meaning of your words?”

Saito said, shaking his head.

“No ... What I said was what I considered my reason, but a reason after all is just, a right. But in the end all I'm doing is being irresponsible, so after that

moment of weakness let me make amends, forgive me for I have caused concern to all.

Listening to the regain senses of Saito, Henrietta's face turned a little surprised, and then blushing with embarrassment.

“ ... I apologize, apparently for a moment I lost control of myself.”

“... No.”

“Maybe it's because I do not know many reliable people, but over time I have come to depend on you, I can assure you it is the same with her, Louise has come to depend on you as much as you depend on her.”

For a moment, both were looking at each other, but ... regaining their senses, they looked away quickly, then Saito said, almost sighing:

“I ... This happened when I was in my world, my life was quite common, even without actually behaving in a bad way, I cannot say I was a good person. In my world, I have not found anything to be able to become passionate, then the days just constantly passing one after another without change, until one day I just became an adult and still nothing major happened, it was just to pass the time for the sake of time itself then it seemed normal as things should be, or so I thought.”

“ .....”

“But coming into this world, I found for the first time, my reason for living, the meaning of my life lay in this world. And it was pretty simple, it was Louise. Never in my life have I seen a girl so pretty. She may be flippant and selfish, but still that's part of what she is, in my attempts to protect her, little by little I gained achievements, and in the end ... different people started to need me. And then my reason was becoming larger. The fact that all needed me, really made me very happy, because until now it has never been like that in my life.

Henrietta silently listened carefully to what Saito had to say.

“And that's why I, that's why I became lighthearted, leaving and neglecting what was really important so I ended up losing both Louise and Derf, but it was not until it was too late, I really hate myself.”

For a moment Henrietta was silent but ... She closed her eyes slowly.

“ ... seems that now is the time to return.”

“Yes.”

The two got up, then steer their way to the guest house. Without realizing when, and the two moons in the sky lit up the garden, making all that beautiful glow on the flower bed.

While Saito was watching the brightness of the moon, he failed to avoid himself wondering:

*What is the meaning of me being in this place?*

The meaning of his own existence.

He was 'solo' until he came to this world and noticed that idea ... so far not even going through his head that there was "a meaning".

Probably if he was still in his world, he would not have raised this question and would spend his life without thinking about it, just being born, growing and eventually dying.

Only recently the meaning was very clear to him.

Everything was for Louise.

He did for the welfare of that young girl that made his heart vibrate ... But now she was gone, she decided to disappear forever from his sight.

After he had reached this world, Saito discovered the endless things before that were unknown to him, things that he would never be able to discover if he had stayed in Tokyo ...

*But right now, I can not find a reason to move forward. Wherever I see the world has turned into a gray, which I have to do something to regain its meaning, but I do not know.*

However, he knew he had work to do, he knew that an imminent danger was

hanging over them.

*Henrietta had said 'I could do it', however inside me I can not even trust and believe in myself to do it again.*

The next day, a garden party was held to commemorate the coronation of the Queen.

Early on, enormous fireworks could be seen flying through the sky, and as cheering the environment, the musicians played continuously from the selected range of musical pieces.

In the front garden of the recently completed Grand Troyes Palace, leaders and renowned personalities of all nations had gathered. They were astonished to learn that the palace of Her Majesty had been built in such a short time, they could not do but praise the incredible potential of the labor force in Gallia.

Afterwards, the palace gates opened and unveiled the figure of Queen Charlotte. The distinguished guests were amazed to have seen the childlike queen. They had heard that her age was only 16 years, however, one would think it was 2 or maybe 3 years younger.

And they couldn't help but notice: Her attire, for whatever reason, has strongly attracted their eyes.

Though it was normal, that during these events one must wear the most dazzling and glorious dresses that one could use. By becoming the ruler of a great nation like Gallia, she had the most skilled tailors in the kingdom, it would be weird if she didn't always present her most magnificent clothes possible.

At this time, the ladies at rows closest to the new queen, could distinguish the extravagance of the current outfits worn by her Majesty. In truth, one could say that the dress of the queen of Gallia was a marking pattern throughout the fashion in Halkeginia.

Still... It must be said that her clothes was somewhat rare.

Her enormous dress resembled an outfit of that of a nun for its white, simple and austere design that was adorned by a jewel in her chest as if it was some kind of pendant, it was stamped with a cross.

To the her right and left, stood a group of nobles who offered a bow, then act as if following the script of a play, prepared to cast the spell of 'Detect Magic'.

This was a crucial part of the ceremony, they had to prove in front of all present, that she was the real Queen Charlotte.

After waiting for a while, not having any reaction by the magic launched just a little earlier, distinguished guests let out a sigh that released the uncertainty that accompanied the ceremony.

Finally, this had proved the true identity of the queen.

Them, Queen Charlotte went to the table prepared in her honor occupying the leading place among the guests. From there, she would give her words of greeting as the program planned.

Then everyone present imagined that her next move would be to accompany them in celebration after going downstairs.

Still ... Queen Charlotte stood motionless in the place she had occupied. Then as if ready to report something, she raised her right hand.

The commotion increasingly grew among the guests who waited expectantly.

“As the queen responsible for governing the kingdom of Gallia, I took the initiative in forming an alliance with the rulers of Romalia, so, with all our power as a nation we will continue our role in the crusade. Halkeginia will always have the divine protection from the Founder!”

For a moment the whole place was silent, then quickly an intense outcry spread as if it were a wave.

As expected, the new government is just a puppet of Romalia, so this was the real intention of why Romalia invaded Gallia. These were the kind of comments that were beginning to be heard from the congregation.

“But you said...”

Upon hearing this statement, Henrietta had been in shock, completely pale and then her body ended up collapsing, only the timely help of Agnes and Guiche, prevented her from falling to the ground, then her two companions were set in place to safeguard the queen.

Just steps away, Saito who had been assigned the task of leading Ondine had turned completely pale.

*But what do those words mean just now?*

*How can Tabitha collaborate with Romalia?*

In truth, it devastatingly shocked all those who were present.

For a moment he thought that perhaps it was not Tabitha, chances are it was someone else, he thought that perhaps she had been hypnotized by some kind of potion ...

But then he remembered, and shook his head.

He had seen only moments ago, and they had casted Detect Magic on her. Therefore, it was clear that this was the real Tabitha ...

“If you think about it, maybe it means that outfit similar to what a nun wears... We anticipated little on what she had planned to do ..."

“I think this is very strange, as if Romalia had planned everything to ensure this will result in coronation and so . . . Romalia, indeed has some guys who are very skilled.” This was the dialogue that came from Malicorne and Gimli.

“You are wrong,” Saito said.

“In which way we are wrong?” Now she just said that she would cooperate for the continuation of the crusade.

“Tabitha cannot say that kind of thing!”

“What? But you heard her just now, didn't you?”

By saying this, Saito had been shocked as he thought he had never heard directly from the mouth of Tabitha that she was against continuing the crusade, he only thought that because of the close friendship they had, their ideals and principles would be the same, or at least that's what he always thought ...

“Hey you, let me explain, political beliefs and friendship are two entirely different matters. It may be true that your friendship with her is very close however, note that it is no wonder that she thinks in a different way than you." Reynald somehow was trying to comfort Saito.

Saito could not help but shake his legs. Tabitha just now, went to her desk to receive the praises from her guests.

Seeing this, Saito started running.

In front of Tabitha’s table a lot of famous people had gathered to give their praises, as expected there was huge row formed, then Saito helplessly, was trying to break through the row of people, which as a result caused the discontentment of the nobles that were present.

“Hey that's wrong! Go to where you came from peasant!”

Then he has no choice but wait in line at end of the row.

Saito could not yet perceive something strange in Tabitha at the distance he saw her, but her aura seemed somehow changed, there was no basis for thinking it was something more than just his imagination.

Then Saito noted that Tabitha had makeup for the occasion. Her lips have red lipstick, her eyelashes were curled and makeup was fairly simple, yet ... Would that change her aura just now, was it because of the makeup?

After waiting an hour, it was finally his turn. Then Saito, opposite to Tabitha, looked into her eyes, she returned his gaze, however Saito could not find in her eyes any affection or even the feeling of longing to meet an old friend.

“I am an ambassador of the kingdom of Tristain, my name is Saito Chevalier de Hiraga Des Ornières.”

Not wondering about his greeting, because it was a courtesy that required the

label.

“It's been a long time.”

“Do you still remember me? “

Then he thought, "that's obvious isn’t it?" But it was a question that had assaulted his mind after meeting with Tabitha in such strange conditions.

“I remembered you.”

In this strange conversation, nobles surrounding them demonstrated bitter amazement, however the man who was behind Tabitha, came to them, and as if by explaining said.

“The Knight Hiraga Chevalier, is a friend from the academy of Her Majesty, if we have a cordial meeting, I assure your Highness will be glad for it.”

The man dressed as a priest with such friendly aura, Saito asked if he was really that young, but for some strange reason, the calculation of age became elusive, for his strong jaw had a strong voice of determination that conveyed his presence.

Noticing the look of Saito, the man offered a bow.

“My name is Ballbelini and I am the Prime Minister, and if I'm not mistaken you should be the fabled hero who accomplished the feat in the Tiger Highway."

Then Saito also corresponded with a bow, and from that moment,

“Excuse me, but I want to talk to Her Majesty Queen Charlotte ..." Saito said.

Hearing this, Lord Ballbelini with a polite but firm determination shook his head in denial.

“My sincere apologies, but now Her Majesty is very busy.”

“Um, actually I am not a mere knight, I am an official ambassador of the kingdom of Tristain and member of the bureau in charge of negotiations with Gallia,” he said, to prove it, Saito was released by Queen, however Lord

Ballbelini remained firm with his refusal.

“It's really a shame ...”

Seeing what was Lord Ballbelini inaccessible, Saito decided to go directly to Tabitha.

“I have something to tell you.”

However, all she did was to stare at Saito helplessly.

“Hiraga-dono, being rude...” Lord Ballbelini interrupting Saito.

“No. I'm not asking you. I'm asking for Tabitha ... I'm asking Her Majesty. Please indeed I have something to ask you.”

However, the answer was harsh and short:

“I'm busy.”

Saito lost his composure.

“Well, tell me are those true? The words you said just now? You seriously plan to collaborate with the crusade?”

Then Tabitha nodded with an expression on her face as if to say: 'Is there a problem?'

“Your... But what, why? What the hell happened?”

“It's okay.”

Due to the levels that reached by the conversation the surrounding nobles grew restless.

“Mr. Ambassador, please leave for later, if you just want to talk, I assure you I will open after a space in my schedule to assist you personally.”

“Hey Tabitha! Explain what was going! Tell me, perhaps you've given to Romalia?! What happened?”

Then trying to end this once and for all, Lord Ballbelini pressed Saito.

“It's enough, if you say another word, I have no choice but to accuse you of heresy!”

In the time Saito was about to answer, a voice from behind stopped him.

“Hey Saito! Time to go! You've bothered enough all these gentlemen!”

It was Guiche, to see carefully, all the boys had gathered were Ondine Knights, then whispered something in his ear.

“ ... I understand your feelings, but you have to be careful! You have to take account your actions here! We are not in Tristain.”

Because of his words, Saito finally calm down.

“ ... I'm sorry.”

Then he made a deep bow and Saito started to leave.

Within the celebration, it was almost entirely the topic of conversation, the proclamation that only a few moments ago had made by the Queen Charlotte. Nearly all the nobles were present, they could be in a state of turmoil and grief.

It was inevitable, in their memories even came vividly the image of the entire imperial fleet reduced to ashes in Carcassonne, due to the magic created by the previous elf priest, that immense fireball ...

Besides, the fact that they were raised with the idea that engaging in a fight with the elves was just crazy.

Still ... There was no nobleman that could try to go against the orders of Romalia or the queen of Gallia.

Indeed it has been decided the battle against the elves, was heard to say in conversations, as if the matter had nothing to do with them.

# Chapter 11 - Bonds

In the evening of that day ... in the guest house.

Saito, who was an escort in front of where Henrietta was staying, was called for to enter her room.

“... Saito-dono.”

It was a voice that betrayed its announcer’s fatigue. Saito exchanged glances with Gimli, who was standing next to him as another member of the guard in defense of the queen, and then entered the room.

“You called me, Princess?”

Upon entering, he saw Henrietta lying on a couch wearing her pajamas. From the moment she heard the proclamation of Queen Charlotte, she had been in that state of confusion that she still exhibited a few moments ago.

The reason for calling Saito was because she had recovered enough sense to speak to him.

“...What happen at your meeting with Queen Charlotte?”

Saito nodded and then explain what happened to Henrietta, that it was impossible to have a conversation with Queen Charlotte ...

“She really looked like a completely different person.”

“Is that so? Then it seems the situation has become much more worrisome than I imagined.”

“What will happen next?”

Due to sudden grief, Henrietta could not stand and put her hands to her face.

“Princess.”

“It's too much, it is the truth too! These Machiavellian snakes! How is it possible that they have tamed Gallia so easily ...!”

“But all is not lost; remember that currently one of the users of Void is missing. It is too early to give up.”

But after all, even with Saito saying these words, he was still doubtful. *Is it likely that Romalia... already devised a plan to deal with that?*

Then Saito thought, *if a Void user died, it would only be necessary that the void be transferred to another family member, right...? Even for the Void, it is assumed that at some point a replacement will emerge...*

As Saito was plunged in these thoughts, he suddenly heard someone hit the window. Henrietta , because of the noise, quickly approached Saito while receiving a slight tremor in her body.

*But we are on the second floor ...*

The first thing Saito did was call Gimli quietly. Gimli, concerned about Henrietta’s condition, nodded with a puzzled face.

Then Saito took out his katana and slowly approached the window.

*Tock tock ...*

Again he heard a knock on the window behind the curtain.

“Who is it?” he asked as his voice echoed.

“...I have a delivery for Her Majesty Queen Henrietta, it is a message from my master.”

Judging from her voice, it was a young woman.

“Message? Then why do you come through the window?”

“Because I cannot make it out through the door,. Also, the current situation in the government of Gallia and the prevailing chaos prevents me. We plead that Tristain can provide assistance.”

Saito then glanced at Henrietta, and she nodded to Saito. She gave the order and Saito started to open the window.

With a quick and deft movement, a young woman entered through the window. No matter where you saw her, she just seemed to be an ordinary girl from town.

Her eyes were a light brown and she was dressed in a skirt that was colored a pale shade of beige. It was clear she was not a mage and one could deduce her skills simply by the fact of having gotten there just by climbing up the walls; they were worthy of admiration.

“Let me introduce myself: my name is Chikasui.”

Wow, that is a peculiar name, but nevertheless it was a very common name of this country. After introducing herself, the girl immediately pulled a letter from her chest and respectfully offered it to Henrietta.

After reading the letter, Henrietta, with heaving eyebrows, rescanned its contents, then she gave it to Saito. The contents read:

*Allow me to express my most humble greetings to you Her Majesty the Queen of Tristain. We communicate you for our next action to execute a coup against the government of Gallia, so I dare to inform you that the current queen is not actually the real Charlotte-sama. But if I may delve into the details of these events, please be kind enough to accept my offer for my servant to lead you to a private meeting.*

“How is it as I thought, that Tabitha... she was not the true Tabitha.”

“But then who sent this message? And why is he asking help from Tristain?”

“If I may, my master will have greater willingness to answer your questions; we have to hurry, servant of the queen.”

The situation was totally dubious, plus there were high chances that it was a trap, however, this was not the time to hesitate. There certainly seemed to be a lack of

options. Saito glanced at Henrietta.

“Can you do it for me?”

“As you wish. I will call Gimli and Guiche.”

Saito then quickly explained the unexpected situation to Guiche and others that had arrived on the scene.

“And that's why I have to leave you for the moment, please request the others to protect this place. And Reynald, please come with me“ Saito called Reynald to accompany him, for he knew it was too dangerous to go alone on a mission like this.

Reynald had demonstrated his skills before on several occasions. In addition to his vast knowledge, he could be useful in overcoming the problems that are waiting.

As expected, although nervous, Reynald accepted Saito’s proposal.

Then Saito informed Chikasui that they were ready to go, and the girl nodded to his words.

Saito and Reynald began following Chikasui, going out through the same window through which she had entered moments ago. Upon leaving, they realized there was little space between the wall and the neighboring building; it was very narrow.

Passing the structures on both sides they could see some large trees blocking the way, which made this location a blind spot for any observers in the vicinity.

*Where will we go next from here?*

If Romalia’s actions were performed in shadow, then it was obvious that their duty was to take these actions to light.

*Should we go beyond the walls of the castle? Will the guards come immediately to stop us?*

However, Chikasui had no plans to make that happen. She bent down to look for

something on the floor, then she accompanied them to an iron gate located on the floor.

Surely, it was a drain entrance that was constructed for maintenance purposes.

Chikasui noiselessly open up the gate and then entered it naturally. Saito and Reynald hesitantly followed her.

They fell about 5 mails from the stairs. Feeling the cold atmosphere inside, they set foot on the ground, where they immediately felt the water around their feet and smelled the stench of the sewage.

Chikasui then took a lamp that was in there and recited a very common spell. She had lit that lamp with magic. Having lit the place, they found themselves wondering…

“This way!”

Chikasui unhesitatingly made her way into the labyrinthine drainage. She was so adept, it was as if this labyrinth was just the streets of the city in which she lived.

Right, left, straight ... They had walked for about an hour until they came to the place where there was an iron ladder.

Then Chikasui began to climb up on that ladder.

Finally, they had reached their destination. Chikasui turn off the lamp and the three were prepared to ascend again.

The moonlight was bright enough to fully illuminate the new place, and from its appearance, it was the courtyard of an abandoned church, but certainly this place was in Versailles in the suburbs of Lutetia.

In this distance ... perhaps it is a secluded spot of about 500 mails, lights could be distinguished from the palace of Versailles.

Then Chikasui prepared to enter the church. Although it had not been in use for a long time it was still clean inside. Chikasui took the hands of Saito and Reynald in order to guide them.

Their destination was the basement of the chapel, which they went immediately after finding the stairs, and in the background the three encountered a door. Facing it, Chikasui approached and quietly voiced their arrival.

“I’m Chikasui.”

Then there was the sound of a latch opening. She opened the door. The first thing they saw were lamps that were lit inside the room, and it seemed that the room was once for the priest of the church.

It was a room with a bed and a small desk.

A young woman with a hood covering her face welcomed the new arrivals. The only thing visible on the face of the figure was her mouth. Saito turned and offered a bow.

“You are the emissaries sent by the kingdom of Tristain, I presume.”

From her speech it was evident that this young woman was a noble, and it seemed certain that this girl was the master of Chikasui.

“I shall introduce myself: My name is Chevalier Hiraga and I belong to the Ondine Brigade of the Royal Guard of the Kingdom of Tristain, next to me is a fellow comrade from the same brigade: his name is Reynald.”

Listening to this the girl withdrew her hood, then in the light of the lamps the stirrings of her long blue hair were seen, and with a tone of impatience she said:

“I introduce myself, my name is Isabella Martel, the commander of the special forces of the Kingdom of Gallia, the Knights of Northern Parterre.”

“Chevalier of the Northern Parterre you say?”

That was certainly the secret order of knights belonging to Tabitha, who dealt exclusively with the dirty work of the Kingdom of Gallia ...

“Since you aware of our existence, the talk will speed up a bit. It's perfect, because we do not have much time, so let me explain the situation: As the report earlier in the letter sent to Queen Henrietta had said, the current queen of Gallia… The letter is not about Charlotte-sama, but about a vile impostor who

changed places with her.”

“What does that mean?”

“I'm afraid right now the details are still unknown. Just three days ago, when I was called to audience with the queen, I found myself in front of her and I realized immediately that this person was not Charlotte-sama, and it was not difficult to deduce that this whole scheme was nothing but a conspiracy."

“...It really is.”

“However, I also understand we are in a difficult situation, this girl was certainly a perfect copy of Charlotte-sama both in appearance and in her actions. Because of the lack of certainty in the assumptions I made towards this fact, I tried to seek counsel with Her Highness the Queen’s Mother, yet we were informed that she could not be accessed according to a letter that describes her health condition, so with no other choice, I decided to use the knights to start a thorough investigation. However, until now we have not collected any conclusive information to unravel the mystery, and our methods must be hidden because of the risk that our enemies become aware of our discovery of their schemes. I am quite completely unsure about Romalia's other henchmen.

All that was said seemed to agree with Saito's first assumption.

As I thought ... *That was not really Tabitha, all her statements to support the crusade were part of the conspiracy of Romalia.*

“Damn ... and I thought, this was their fault, they put so much effort into such a stupid idea ... And most importantly ... Where is the real Tabitha?”

“I'm afraid to say that we have not figured it out yet, I can only assure you that this issue is currently the highest priority.”

“I understand that, and what do you want us to do?”

“Frankly, we ask you the favor of not doing anything; making a reckless action would be extremely dangerous. So let us handle this matter, in order to maintain this advantage ... Also, to avoid warning the enemy that we have discovered the change they have made with Her Majesty Queen Charlotte, I ask that you also act as if you were not aware of their actions. If you understand our position, I

would like to request a last favor: kindly pass this information to her Majesty Queen Henrietta of the way you feel is best.”

“Roger.”

“If something relevant occurs we will let you know via letter, but due to the risk of enemy interception, it would be very unwise to just send regular letters. I would like you to use this.”

What had been delivered to Saito was a list with a series of numbers that were used to decipher a code.

Saito took the list while nodding, and then save it in his pocket.

“Well then, I bid thee take care.”

Saito said these words and was prepared to leave the place when...

“Wait! Chikasui! Please lead them to the exit.”

“Oh, right!”

It was true that if they left unattended they would likely lost their way on the drainage, however, what caused Isabella to stop Saito in his attempt to leave was more evident in her face.

“Is something wrong?”

After hearing this question Isabella went to Saito and bowed her head.

“I am ... the daughter of Joseph, the former king of Gallia. On behalf of my father, I would like to ask for an apology.”

Saito's body became paralyzed, and from the color of Isabella’s hair, Saito had assumed she belonged to the royal family, but this... Reynald was also surprised; his face altered and he opened his mouth as if trying to say something, but immediately called Saito to keep his composure.

“Saito.”

Saito thought back for a few seconds to get ready to say something, and his face

broke into a solemn expression. As if whispering he said:

“I give my condolences.”

Greatly shocked Isabella opened her eyes and then lowered her head silently.

After leaving that dark place, the moonlight seemed to have become more intense. When they were about to enter the drainage again, a sudden voice urged them to stop.

“Hey!”

Saito turned to the place where the voice came from.

A man who was watching them and was sitting in the rubble suddenly got up. Saito saw his face lit by the moonlight and was speechless with shock.

“Y.., you ...”

The man's face was the one with which he had faced in Cherphis, the gigantic man accompanying Bleu...

“You, how this place brings back memories, you know, I used to get frequent long missions out on this place. Do not tell me that you also belong to Chevalier of North Parterre?, Ha, as if that were possible ...”

“Why did you come here?” Saito asked the man ... Jack scratched his head.

“Why do you think of such silly questions, you already know why. We finally reached an agreement for the price of your head.”

“Who is this guy?” Reynald asked, disturbed.

“It is one of the companions of the guys who attacked me.”

“Um, one ... Sicario?”[T/L:Not sure about this]

“Tell me, don't you have a great word to refer to me?”

Reynald turned blue, and then his face turned completely red as he pulled out his wand.

“Hey! hey! You better stop, you know I do not like to kill all witnesses, so I think you would be better if you just stand there and watch.”

Then Saito pulled the code list from his pocket and handed it to Reynald.

“Or, hey ...”

“Please give this information to Her Majesty.”

“B, but ...”

“I am the only target of this man, am I not?” After Saito said that, Jack said while nodding:

“Yes, just as he says. No offense but I have no interest in guys like you, or whatever they put up to guys like you in this place.”

“Saito...”

“Quickly, I leave the rest to you, Chikasui-san.”

Chikasui nodded at Saito's request, Reynald took her arm and the two were out of sight upon entering the drainage.

Saito turned back to face Jack and beheld an intimidating face... his fear seemed to paralyze his body.

In Cherphis, Saito remembered seeing a certain disinterest in his eyes, *so he was able to follow me? To ambush me in Gallia was ...*

For a second, Saito thought he could escape, however, by what I heard this guy was chasing him because he had acquired a contract with whomever it was who wanted to remove him. Even if he could flee, he knew Jack would continue to chase him in order to achieve this goal.

He also recalled the words a few moments ago, and remembered that he was familiar with this place.

“Then, as I said, sir, I do not have a grudge against you nor do I intended to follow you even abroad ... however things just turned out to be this way. You

see, they called us for an internal investigation, but I never imagined that I would be coming here to see you! The exact moment I happened to enter the hideout was the exact moment I met you. It's my lucky day, don’t you think?"

*Damn, it doesn't even make sense to flee...*

Due to the circumstances, all that was left in Saito was fight, but no matter how much he tried to build up the courage to face Jack, his body could not gather any strength. As if it were a shudder, his arms and legs felt stiff.

He was like a toddler who could not contain the anxiety experienced in fighting for the first time.

Seeing Saito in this state, Jack could not stop but show a surprised face on him.

“Hey what's wrong? Do you feel bad? The first thing you need to do now is to be brave.”

“Nothing's wrong!”

Jack laughed ...

“Is that so, because what good are you if who cannot even move out of that fear, it's no fun you know! Well, I'm supposed to come here to kill you but don't blame me, since this is only a job, but the truth is I'm starting to like this! Very well, I promise I will raise a prayer for you when you die, so surrender!”

Saito said, drawing his katana from his waist, then the rune on his left hand glow.

“Hey hey! Hurry up and die! Finish talking already!”

“Stop saying stupid things and get ready to fight!”

Despite wanting to show his strength, Saito noticed the tremor in the tip of the katana he held.

“Well, first I will tell you how much your bounty is. Really, it’s a habit of mine: before I'm going to kill someone, I tell them the price paid for their head. To me, this is the best thing to do. Tell me, knowing it would be somewhat fulfilling,

don't you think? So, the price they'll pay when we're done with your life is 140000 ECU! Quite a fortune; with that you could buy 3 or maybe 4 small castles. I never thought you could be a guy that was worth so much. You should be proud!”

*You bastard, that's his way of making fun of me,* probably at this time the only thing in Saito's mind was to beat him.

“And tell me, you think you can do that work just by yourself?”

“I suppose. Really, I always knew since the first time we met, that I would be enough to kill you. Not that I want to brag but I'm a lot more stronger than Duduu(Bleu). And so, now I promise you for real; this is your last time!”

A cold sweat flowing from his neck, Saito froze.

There must be an opening in Jack.

In truth no matter where he searched he could not find an opening in his defense. The immense pressure exerted by his presence seemed to be winning the battle ...

“If you have any last will, don't hold it. Provided it is something you can write in this place, I’ll let you put the will in that wall, but if you write something problematic I will delete it.”

Wordlessly Saito lunged at him. In a single beat he was beside his opponent, and Saito started to sweep one of the legs of Jack.

“Hell, you’re so impatient!”

But Jack had jumped and easily dodged the attack.

His lightweight and agile movements did not fit with the huge body he possessed.

Yet Saito had foreseen this movement and he quickly jumped up and raised his katana over his head.

“I have you!”

Saito had full confidence in his speed. Those guys had the ability to use "hardening" which gave them the advantage of defence against bullets and knives, but, at this rate it would be impossible to have enough time to perform that technique.

“Ooh, What an incredible speed!”

However, despite the attack Jack did not appear to have intentions to dodge it. Unexpectedly he stopped the attack by grabbing the katana with his bare right hand.

RKK!

Then taking a fast turn, Jack softly landed on the floor.

“Well, now it's my turn.”

Jack started to recite a spell, which made Saito took a defensive stance. Saito was ready, he even remembered the spell that Jack had used before: creating walls and throwing rocks were his specialties as an earth mage.

*But ... actually he had an attack that was effective against earth magic.*

Yet Saito was confident that he could face the magic attacks.

What‘s his next attack?

A hand from ground to hold my feet?

Or maybe releasing some golems?

There is also the possibility he'll harden his fists and try smash me.

However, Jack's attack was not anything Saito imagined, he took up a stone and threw it calmly to Saito.

"?"

Although it appeared as a simple attack, the projectile speed was incredible as the stone seemed to have been launched with the power and precision of a cannon.

In the mind of Saito, Derflinger's words resurfaced.

*"Those guys have magic casted on their joints ..."*

Saito could somehow deflect the stone with his katana, but in the next instant, Jack was already on him ready to connect a new attack.

Then his huge fist implanted itself deep into Saito's stomach.

The impact made Saito drop his katana and sent him flying and crashing into the ground.

“Yo, swordsman you're a tough guy!“ Jack told Saito, who was lying on the floor.

Seeing his katana lying on the floor and completely out of reach, Saito felt helpless and all the strength left his body ...

*I lost.*

It was over in an instant.

Although I knew that this guy is not only attacking with magic, yet ...

As pictured ... *I could not get my heart to shiver.*

In his previous battles, just hearing Louise recite her spells would give him great strength, but knowing how he lost her, nothing will give encouragement to his heart.

*I ... now that Louise is gone I have nothing left to fight for, I knew that from the start.*

Gandálfr is a familiar that only serves to gain time for his master to recite their spells ...

If the familiar loses his master, the whole purpose for which he fights vanishes.

*It's useless.*

Resignation was the only thing left inside his body, as Saito saw the threatening

wand pointed to the place where he lay.

“Then ... I'll ask again, do you have any last will?”

Approaching slowly was a terrible reality; he could die. But even more cruel than the terrifying idea of death was, *If I die I can never see Louise again, I cannot apologize to her, these thoughts of despair filled Saito.*

“I do not want ..... d-.”

“What did you say? I cannot hear you.”

“ ... I do not want to die!”

Looking quite distressed Jack, shook his head.

“That's impossible, you know that I have to do my job. Think, ask something else.”

“I want to see.”

“See? Who?”

“I want to see.. I want to see Louise.”

“That too is impossible.”

“Louise ...”

Saito began to mourn, which provoked a great anger in Jack.

“Phew, That's wrong!... Do you think to end the fight in tears? Damn ... are you insulting me in our battle?”

“Louise ... Sorry ... I ...”

“Stop it! Weep not jerk! Prove you're a man! 140000ECU! Prove yourself!”

Hoping and the pain being unbearable made Saito threw a desperate cry.

“LOUUU

*But to no avail, sorry that I could not do more than disappear into the darkness of night.*

Jack's face sprouted with more and more veins. His anger was indescribable.

“Bastard ... Not only you dare to insult our fight by screaming, now you're asking help from a woman ... you trash! How you can you be so pathetic? You're weak! You're a coward! You're a disappointment!...”

Jack raised his wand and started to cast a spell. A large landmass rose from the ground and with powerful "alchemy" it turned into gunpowder.

Seeing this Saito attempted to run by dragging himself, then Jack said to Saito while launching the tremendous amount of gunpowder,

“You will not even leave the dust of what you once were! Ha!”

It was at that moment.

Within the mass of powder that was suspended in the air, suddenly, from its center a small explosion had occurred. Such an explosion had taken place before the mass reached Saito, and the ignition of gunpowder caused it, which reverberated noise savagely and the angry outburst of impact threw Jack into the air.

The cloud of smoke from the explosion covered the whole area.

“.....”

With time the white smoke began to clear ... Saito was speechless and shocked ...

“And you, what do you think you're doing?”

Pink blonde hair glowed under the light of the moon. With wand in hand, raising her arm as she stretched her body, the one that was standing before Saito was the figure of a "VOID user".

Louise stood right in front of Saito. He could not believe it; it was truly a miracle, that Louise has appeared in a flash right before his eyes. It was a miracle.

Dressed like a nun and preparing her wand to make an attack, the figure of Louise ... was quite a miraculous divine appearance. It had only been enough for Saito's eyes to flood with tears.

“Louise ...”

“You’re a pathetic familiar! If possible, I want someone better to accompany me so I can save the world.”

“Louise!”

Without thinking Saito threw himself to embrace her, but what he got was a kick that hit him square in the face.

“If you have time to get sentimental, then go and pick up your sword quickly! The match is not over yet.”

It was just as she said, slowly from within the cloud of smoke a figure rose.

“Grr ... Who the hell are you? ...”

“Who am I, I regret to say that I didn’t give my name to give to a poor soldier like you.”

“Y-, you try to make fun of me ... as you wish, I have no problem in sending one more guest to Valhala!”

*Seeing her face, Louise remembered seeing Jack before. What is this guy doing here ...? Is it not that this is the man who taught me in Cherphis about the convent of Saint Margarita.*

Why is this man attacking Saito? Bah, that doesn’t matter, better ask Saito after.

Louise picked up the katana of Saito, stopped, then returned it and said:

“Hey you, really, don't tell me you've lost to that man?”

“Only with that ...? He's strong you know.”

At this Louise replied nonchalantly.

“Someone strong, where?”

Then Jack turned to Louise and used "alchemy" to launch countless iron arrows immediately at Louise. In response, with a wave of her wand, Louise confronted the rain of arrows with an explosion.

The powerful blast repelled the arrows onto the ground.

Incredible, Jack could only watch as his arrows scattered in pieces all over the place.

“Wh-, What kind of spell did you use ...”

Examining in detail, Jack saw the powerful, magical aura emitting from Louise. *I understand, she is not certainly someone common, but ... This magical power is unnatural, perhaps she managed somehow artificially develop it...*

This kind of magic is very potent.

Still ...

*She’s no match for me.*

She had deduced that truth simultaneously. Louise had now succeeded in developing a totally different level of willpower. The incident between Henrietta and Saito had been the biggest spark of emotion in her life, but because of it, all the vast amount of emotions that accumulated in her had overflown. What now prevailed inside of her was her pride...

In this moment she felt a tremendous power flowing within her.

Everything started from her escape from the convent of Saint Margarita ...

After all, the nearest land was about 10 kilomails. She had been able to cover this enormous distance in small consecutive sections using "Teleport".

That experience had provided an immense confidence boost to Louise.

*I mastered the Void spell as much as I can.*

Nothing will make me hesitate.

From the bottom of her heart an unknown force began to boil inside, her willpower that becomes her magical power pervaded everything inside her body.

*Although no one is willing to accept you, I will accept you always Louise Françoise.*

Jack could not help but, perplexed, continue watching this pink-haired girl.

*She is ... of that time ...*

It's definitely the girl who Jannette sent to the convent of Saint Margarita, her hair is a different color but ... So she never arrived at the convent, or whether she did, did she manage to escape from that prison?

Even so, most importantly, she has immense magical power.

Jack was in turn a powerful wizard to have easily noticed that.

*If only I could get my hands on that "magical device with continuous emission of alchemy" everything would be easier, he thought, but then ...*

Anyway, there is something that I can use in a situation like this, since that device is essential to fulfill the dream of Damian-niisan, then ...

*It is very simple, I only have to exchange my life for more power.*

Jack started to recite a spell and the earth began to emerge numerous golems.

Jack's plan seemed to be assaulting Louise and Saito, using a small army to protect its master. However, this tactic was intended only to gain time.

Then Jack was prepared to recite a new spell.

Seeing those tens of golems in front of her, Louise decided to give an order to Saito.

“Come on, in front of you are plenty of weaklings. They are your opponents, go do your job!”

Nodding, Saito immediately lunged at them, wielding the katana in his hands. There was a huge amount of golems and they were worthy creations of Jack; their movements were abnormal and they could almost mimic the agility of their master, who Saito faced with much difficulty.

But ...

*Ur Slisaaz ansuur ken ... (uru-surisaazu-anzuuru-ken)*

Saito could hear Louise from behind intoned of spell as she read from her book. In one beat, Saito was filled with an immense amount of strength, and a completely different kind of tears covered his face.

The resonance of the voice of Louise was like a bell, Saito imagined in his heart.

Because of that voice, because of that appearance,

*Louise is beautiful.*

The most beautiful one that can exist in this world, she has completely smitten my heart.

Saito could predict the movements of the golems in advanced. Their movements were clear in his mind, his blows done with the katana were incredibly accurate. It would be impossible to imagine that Saito's movements were from the same person who fought Jack earlier.

But ... Upon hearing Louise's chant a mysterious feeling of invincibility invaded Saito's senses. It was truly as if he was born with wings on his back, his mysterious movements were the expression of power flowing in his body.

*What happened? It seems as if the golems were moving slowly!*

Saito precisely cut each of those stone guardians, and he pitched a war cry.

The spell Jack was reciting came to Louise's ears. Upon hearing it she could conclude that it was "alchemy". So the keen senses of Louise immediately planned the course of action to address it.

She made her mind and drew a spell to counter it.

Immersed in the execution of her spell, Louise seemed disconnected from all the chaos around her at that moment. She could be seen as if she had retired to a world where she lived alone. Yet Louise's mind was working separately from her body; she concentrated while her 5 senses still perceived information from the environment, so she could always be aware of the course of battle.

From a corner of her consciousness, Louise knew of the condition of her familiar. Before her eyes, Saito was running toward all the golems attacking him, one by one.

*He works so hard to protect…*

Then Louise realized that her bond with Saito was stronger than that as lovers: a chain forged by fate, and no matter how far they were from each other, they could never be separated; no matter how ragged were the links that bound them, they could never break ...

Louise had come to Versailles to inform Henrietta and the others about the existence of Josette, when perhaps coincidental, a cry from Saito reached her ears.

*Within the darkness of the night she had arrived on time... also the fact that she saw the danger in Saito and reach him only with a "Teleport". Was it the work of fate too?*

In the end she asked if he was okay, that was really what I wanted, a whole range of emotions crossed her mind, which combined with shudder to form a bright aura.

The Void's power emanated stunningly and wrapped Louise's body.

Meanwhile, Jack’s spell was complete.

After refining the power of his "Alchemy" the complex spell started to run on

the ground under his feet, holding him as the epicenter, a sort of concentric circles drawn so as to serve as a catalyst to increase the range and power of his alchemy.

The unique magic power that Jack had obtained with alchemy surely would unleash devastating results.

Then the floor rose, a gigantic circle of land which had about 100 mails in radius and a thickness of 10 mails, this vast amount of land ... instantly became gunpowder, this was the end result of using all of his remaining willpower to magnify his alchemy.

With such a quantity of gunpowder, surely the blast range of a few kilomails would, to all humans within the range where it would be impossible to escape, be smashed into pieces.

“Onii-san! I leave the rest to you!”

After shouting his spell, the conjure mass of gunpowder made its "ignition", but at that moment ...

Louise saw Jack lowered his wand while swinging, then the soil brightened ... the gunpowder from the land had, in an instant, returned to its original form.

It has been the work of "Dispel".

Then the "ignition" that Jack launched only managed to spark a little gunpowder. It was an amazing feat of magic that Louise had demonstrated.

Having exhausted his willpower ... Having used his own life as an amplifier to strengthen the effects of alchemy, Jack exceeded the capabilities of his own body ...

Totally exhausted, he rolled his eyes and without a shred of conscience fell, lying on the floor.

All finally became calm…

# Epilogue

Reynald had brought Henrietta and all the members of the Ondine Knights, who were accompanied by a large number of officers of Gallia, and approached the place. Suddenly, the show of arms caused an uproar in the middle of the night.

Jack, still unconscious, was recognized by the officers of Gallia as a former member of Chevalier Do North Partel and he was immediately taken into custody.

These officers also asked Saito the reason he was there, and what Saito said was that he was about halfway to meeting Louise and became lost in the course, ending up at that place.

He also added additional information about the incident. He honestly admitted an unknown nobleman in his country had hired a group of murderers to kill him.

Still agitated, Henrietta came running to Saito's location. The first thing she did was look at him, and after confirming he was safe an expression of relief washed over her face.

Finally the issue was resolved, including that of Louise’s, and all decided to return to the guest house.

In Henrietta’s room, Louise and Saito were called inside so the three could be alone. First, they agreed to put an order and reveal all the information they had obtained over the course of time.

Saito and Louise began explaining everything that had happened over the last few weeks, and at that time Saito decided to pursue a group of bandits who called themselves the "Elemental Siblings" going behind his head as he had decided to attack. Derflinger was lost in the first battle against them.

Upon hearing of the death of Derflinger, tears welled up in the eyes of Louise,

and for a moment they all kept a respectful silence.

However, Louise knew that now was not the time to mourn, so she continued to listen carefully to what Saito had to tell.

The exchange came to the point where they explained to Louise that the current Tabitha had been replaced by an impostor who had taken her throne in Gallia and how the impostor proclaimed support for the continuation of Romalia's crusade.

Louise was not aware of what she missed in her absence. Saito then informed Henrietta about the details of the conversation he had with Isabella before Jack attacked.

After listening to what Saito said, Henrietta gave a deep sigh.

“What a burden ... problems just accumulate one after another...! And worst of all, you were attacked right during our diplomatic visit in Gallia!”

“Looks like it was just coincidence, and to have once belonged to the secret squad of knights of Gallia, us being here just gave the Siblings the opportunity to make their job easier.”

After saying this, Henrietta nodded to Saito's comment.

Now done with speaking, Saito and Henrietta gave a stern look towards Louise.

“If you may, could you explain what you've been doing all this time?”

Louise began to tell Saito and Henrietta what had happened.

After she ran away and spent her days drinking to forget her pain, she encountered a strange girl in the village of Cherphis and the people that this girl called ‘brothers’, who informed her about a hidden monastery ...

“The huge man named Jack; I was very surprised when I recognized him and saw him fighting Saito.”

“So that means you were hiding in the village of Cherphis with them ...?”

“Yes, I asked those guys to help me hide.”

The unexpected connection between all the events so far greatly surprised the three.

Afterwards, Louise started to tell them about the encounters she had in the convent of Saint Margarita.

“Josette is a girl I had befriended there, and one day I witnessed Julius taking her somewhere, and I thought that he might want Josette, thus I conclude that she's likely the new "User of the Void".

As Louise relayed her suspicions, the other two were greatly surprised.

It was inevitable that their anger and despair got mixed-up, however Henrietta could endure and overcome it somehow.

As pictured ... Romalia had already found a replacement for the missing Void user. The Romalians wanted to continue the crusade despite the death of Joseph.

“So that means this girl is identical to... Tabitha?”

“Yes, I am almost certain that the impostor is Josette. At the convent, I had to wear a special cross that could magically change my facial features. Surely this girl ... is Tabitha's twin sister.”

Finally, Louise informed them about her return and escape from the convent for the sole purpose of passing this information to them.

After their conversation... Louise stood upright, and her posture changed to match her cold attitude.

“If I may, I believe our conversation is over. Can you tell me which room I should stay in?”

“My private tent is out there, but I hope you do not mind it's a bit cramped,”

Saito said. Louise stared at him heavily.

“Could you explain why I have to stay in your tent?”

“Well, really, is that what we're ...”

What happen was Saito only increased the anger of Louise. *So that's it... even though Louise returned here, it does not mean she has forgiven me for that incident. Man, I think that it should be pretty obvious...*

After Louise made her sudden declaration, Henrietta coughed to clear her throat, and said in an annoyed expression,

“If you ask for a room I regret to inform you there is none available, for you must take into account that we are in a foreign country.”

“Well, if that's the case, I have no choice but to stay at an inn in Lutetia.”

Henrietta had anticipated that Louise would still feel bitter, so she glanced towards Saito.

“Saito-dono, therefore, I wish you will give your tent to Louise.”

“Eh? And if I do that ...”

“Under such circumstances, I have no qualms if you stay in my room for one night,” Henrietta said with a mixed expression.

Louise's shoulders began to shake.

“Eeeeh? But, that's not right!”

“At the moment there is an immense danger that constantly threatens us, so it is essential that the queen of Tristain is protected by her elite escort at all times. So, please let Saito stay here overnight to protect me.”

“B, but ...”

“Is it alright to you, Louise?”

Then Louise nodded with a pained face, like she was suffering from a seizure.

“It doesn't matter how I feel; if that's what your Majesty wants, go ahead. I humbly ask you to accept it as a gift.”

Listening to Louise, Henrietta also started to experience a tick in her eyebrow. “What you just said ... What does it mean? Eh, Louise?”

“It means that I kindly ask you to please accept this dog that I am offering as a gift. He can be a bit annoying, so try not to hit him too much.”

Henrietta began to move her fingers nervously through her hair as if she had lost her patience, but trying not to break her dignity as queen, she went to Saito and showed a smile.

“You've heard it Saito-dono, we have permission from your master. There is no longer any obstacle. However, because of all the commotion that occurred recently, I think I will have trouble falling asleep. If you are not bothered, please be kind as to accompany me for a glass of wine.”

Caught between the hostilities of these two women, Saito did not know how to appropriately answer each proposition. He was helplessly, entirely lost within himself. Truly, I'm walking among rows of gunpowder-filled barrels and holding a torch. I make the slightest slip, Baaam! Think of a giant explosion.

Then in a voice trembling with anger, Louise said:

“No matter how many years pass Princes never change, you're just like when we were kids. When I was playing with one of my dolls "*Ah Louise! That was a nice doll you have there, give it to me please!*" and then I had to put a face as if nothing was wrong and I had to give it to you.”

“That was when we were kids, let us leave things of the past in the past.”

“As if I could! It happens time and again, again and again. Saito, let me warn you, you must be very careful as this princess tends to get bored of the things she asked for very quickly.”

With a completely different voice, and almost shouting, Henrietta replied:

“How dare you compare men to dolls! But, that is what you always do, Louise.”

These two were about to explode into brilliant fireworks.

“I, I’ll sleep outside, yes, so the princess can stay in her room and Louise can use

my tent.”

“I'm afraid I cannot allow you do that. If I remember correctly, I gave you an order to be my escort, and you need to be responsible for my safety at all times. Yes, yes, even if you have to sleep in the same bed with me.”

Inevitably Louise exploded, unable to hold her shaking shoulders still, Louise came to brokenly murmur something.

“... Oh God, tell me in truth ... since when did you become an adult?”

Henrietta slowly turned her gaze to Louise's face, her expression now totally expressionless. Saito remembered seeing a face like this when they were in the royal palace. This expression on her face always emerged in critical situations, and Saito could practically smell the fuses burning.

“Did you say something!!?”

“I said I only succeeded in revealing this useless adult sensuality of yours, your Majesty!” Henrietta started shaking out of anger.

“You, perhaps fail to understand the consequences of what you're saying!”

“If only your ability to handle political affairs was as great as your sensuality, we wouldn't have to worry about the security of Tristania as we do now...!!”

Louise turned around with an arrogant attitude, as if she had launched an unbeatable final attack.

In response Henrietta furiously approached Louise and attempted slap her, however Louise skillfully evaded fire.

“Yes, I would advise you to stop the work of being a Queen. I assure you that you would be much better if you worked as an actress at the Theatre Royal Tanaijiiru, and at the same time peace will be achieved in the kingdom! Indeed everything comes together PERFECTLY!”

Following Louise's insult Henrietta connected a tripping blow to Louise's legs, the skill with which she remembers from time of her childhood.

Lying on the floor for a moment, Louise recovered from the impact and calmly got off the floor.

For a moment she just glared at Henrietta.

“As you wish Princess, but for the record let me make it clear, so far my record is 27 wins, 25 losses and 2 draws!”

“Not how I remember it; I have 29 wins, 24 losses and 1 draw!”

Then the fight between the two started. Little bitch! Idiot woman! Incompetent Queen! Priestess no breasts! As the insults began to accumulate, it was increasingly evident that the verbal abuse will lead to physical confrontation.

“Stop it! Stop it please!”

Seeing this horrible scene and unable to bear it any longer, Saito tried to come between them and stop their fight, but instead got a fist in the stomach from Henrietta and a kick in the head from Louise.

Saito ended up launched onto the floor of the rough battlefield.

After losing his consciousness, the fierce war between these two women continued indefinitely, until at some point, the two gasped with each other while both dropped rendered feeble on the bed. Still breathing hard ... but without really having the strength to move yet, they argued:

“27 wins, 25 losses, 3 draws!”

“29 Wins, 24 losses, 2 draws!”

Then as if Henrietta murmured:

“You say cruel things and really, really know where a strike will hurt most!”

“Princess--You too, you were ruthless to take advantage of my weak points!”

Then sighing Henrietta said:

“Take care of Saito-dono. Bring him to your tent, it's an order.”

“I do not want to.” Louise said stubbornly.

“I ask you, do it as a favor, right now I want to be alone," Henrietta said with a sad solemn voice.

Regaining consciousness, Saito realized that he was in his own tent. At the side of his bed, sitting on a folding chair he spotted Louise, distracted, looking at the landscape from the window of the tent.

Saito suddenly felt warmth flowing through the inner edge of her eye.

Her figure was simply an appearance of divine beauty, and while dressed simply like a nun, even this could not hide the incredible charm radiating from Louise.

As her resolution was unshaken, Louise's eyes just turned gently to see the outside from that window, her mouth in a straight line only accentuated the serenity that now dwelt in her face. The charm possessed by Henrietta was so vast that you could be drown in it, indeed was disturbingly fascinating, however ...

If the beauty of Henrietta represented the evils of desire, then in contrast, the charm of Louise represents the "divine" blessing. This blessing was truly a sight quite unusual, but Saito really admired it... Like when she was determined to do something, like when she gathered the courage to face her fears, it was on those occasions when Saito was lucky enough to see Louise radiates this divine charm.

*Charming women are very common in this world.*

But only one women could show this divine expression: Louise.

Then in a voice that was stuck in his throat Saito said:

“Louise...”

Upon hearing this, Louise turned her head towards him.

“Hey, are you crying?”

“No ... Is that ... I'm so glad you're back ...”

Saito had realized that simple truth.

The reason I had decided to stay in this world.

*Because Louise is here. There was no other reason. And now I've discovered the reason why I'm attracted to Louise.*

Before, my life had always been gray and boring. When I lived in Tokyo, I had accepted this truth so naturally I had no time to question whether this was meant to be or not.

But the moment he met Louise, he learned a lot of things that until now he didn’t know existed.

Fun times, happy times, sad moments, painful memories ...

The first time he went to a dance ... When he thought "how cute she is" his heart also trembled for the first time. Louise had made his heart dance. And likewise, for the time he was in this world, Saito kept thinking of the possibilities of a "future" for him.

"I get the impression that Louise has transported me somewhere."

*To a place not here, a very exciting place, I was transported to a fantasy world ...*

Maybe this is all my imagination, or maybe it's all just a misunderstanding, but at some point I actually felt it; I sensed that this moment actually existed. And it became the most precious thing he had ever had in his life.

Saito stood up and tried to hug Louise, but Louise quickly stopped him ...

“Don’t be naive. You know, the reason I returned has nothing to do with the fact that I wanted to see you again, it was only because I felt compelled to tell everyone about the appearance of the missing Void user.”

Although she had said this in a cold voice, the joy she felt at being able to see

Saito again exceeded everything else. Then Saito embraced Louise with all his might, and of course Louise tried to resist ... for a moment. She threw kicks and punches but Saito only hugged her stronger.

*Seriously, what's the matter with this guy?*

He could have done this with the Princess, how dare he, being a little kind to me and have me dancing in the palm of his hand. In truth it was very painful, *I will never forgive him.*

But then ... I feel so relieved to embrace Saito again, I feel like a puzzle piece, a piece made exclusively to fit into his arms.

And as if it was an instinct, a thought arose in the mind of Louise, *I want to kiss him.*

*No! He was just making fun of me.*

*He was unfaithful.*

*And I will never forgive you, you'll see.*

Louise felt a frustration so great that almost made her cry, that was the truth.

Then Saito began to bring his lips close.

“No, let me go, never!”

*I love you, I could not take it anymore, I love you so much.*

“You did the same with the Princess right? No, never!”

Upon hearing this, the face Saito changed as if he was about to cry.

*But what is she thinking?*

“Please.”

“No! I’ll never forgive you!”

“I understand.”

“You do not understand! I’ll never forget it, what you and Princess did, never, even if I die, I will not forgive you!”

Saito nodded and then pressed his lips to Louise.

*This guy, as if he'll understand.*

This was her thought, but still she was unable to reject the kiss.

Without the two realizing, the night was coming to an end.

The light of a new dawn was beginning to flood the tent through the window. The glare completely colored Louise’s dress from deep black to bright blue.